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PICTURES IN THE WALLACE COLLECTION

THE LAUGHING CAVALIER

By Frans Hals

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PICTURES
IN THE
WALLACE
COLLECTION

BY

FREDERICK MILLER

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WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

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CHAPTER I

A TREASURE-HOUSE OF ART

PICTURES IN THE WALLACE COLLECTION

CHAPTER I

A TREASURE-HOUSE OF ART

THE collection of Art treasures at Hertford House, bequeathed to the nation by the widow of Sir Richard Wallace in 1897, is indeed a gift of unparalleled value and magnificence. A nice and discriminating taste has guided those who purchased so many valuable canvases, and the pictures gain an added interest from the fact that they are shown in the house of their former owner. Thus the private dwelling of a connoisseur has been converted into a most unique museum, where the public may enjoy for all time splendid specimens of the fine arts, which have been gathered regardless of cost and as a labour of love.

Among so much that is perfect of its kind the eye is

apt to wander aimlessly, and to secure no very distinct impressions; and on this account attention is focussed in these pages upon some two dozen of the 761 works which adorn the walls. In making the selection of masterpieces here reproduced, care has been taken to choose examples that, when reduced to the size of these pages, shall lose none of their character and effect from this necessary compression.

Where there is such a wealth of material to draw from, a choice of subjects is difficult, but as this book addresses itself to a wide public, a general taste of the best quality is given, and pictures of the modern school find a place side by side with work by those whose names rank highest in the hierarchy of painters. Thus we seek to reflect the wide sympathy of collectors who have placed on the same walls examples of so many various schools, and to condemn that narrow and exclusive favouritism with which so many critics cloak themselves.

Pictures must be lived with if they are to be appreciated to the full, and these fine facsimiles, reproduced by the delicate and beautiful Collotype process, will not only serve to recall favourite masterpieces, but will often reveal points and qualities in the originals that had escaped our notice when we had not opportunity to examine each detail. Used in this way, and studied in this spirit, these reproductions will quicken our appreciation of fine art, the volume will enrich our

shelves, and each counterfeit presentment will become a cherished possession.

Let us then set ourselves to see how these famous artists lived and worked, for the more intimate our knowledge of the man the more correctly shall we judge the productions of his brush, and until we know something of his aims, we cannot hope as honest critics, or attached disciples and admirers, to gauge his attainments and appreciate his handiwork.

The artist is a workman—a bricklayer if you will, who, using good mortar to keep them in position, so sets his bricks as to satisfy the eye both from a sense of security and symmetry. His mind controls his fingers, and directs his hand in its cunning, but as he is dealing with such diverse things as space, light, air, pigments, canvas, he must be first and foremost a well-trained craftsman. His picture should be contained wholly within its frame, telling its story so plainly that he who runs may read; for as its primary appeal is to the sensuous emotions, it speaks in an universal language. It should no more require an annotated catalogue than does music, to which the art of painting is in many ways akin.

It is to the eye that appeal is made by painting, or by any plastic art, and though a well-founded literary description may go far, it will be still more helpful if accompanied, as in this case, by accurate reproductions of the pictures themselves, which we can look at as

leisurely as at the canvas of a friend seen by invitation at his studio.

An artist, or a judge of art, when asked for an opinion on a brother artist's work, does not put to himself the question, "What does he mean?" but "How does he speak in paint?" and we cannot do better than adopt this method in our attempt to appreciate these masterpieces, using our reproductions as a key to their interpretation. This will at once stimulate an interest in the originals, and rivet the attention of our readers upon pictures of established merit.

The Wallace Collection affords to those who delight to take a historical and psychological view of art an unique opportunity in the department of French art of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Until the nation inherited these specimens of the best work of Watteau, Pater, Boucher, Greuze, and Fragonard, there was but little opportunity for studying a school in which the age it appealed to is so vividly recalled to the mind; but lovers of art who can inspect these choice examples have a peculiar advantage unknown to those who frequent museums and picture-galleries whose walls are crowded with samples of all sorts, for here a delightful harmony prevails.

These earlier French pictures claim our attention as vivid records of the extravagant follies of their day, and if on other grounds they are distasteful to us, they have distinct historic value as revelations

of passion—in powder and in periwig, and of the *joie de vivre* to which the leisured class abandoned itself.

French painters of the nineteenth century are also represented here as in no other country outside their own.

The British School of the eighteenth century is splendidly represented at Hertford House, and what a school it was! What distinction, what largeness of treatment, what a sense of ease and mastery! The "grand manner" may have led its votaries into some excess and over emphasis, such as begets ridicule rather than awe in the modern spectator; yet on the whole this deliberate striving after dignity, strength of presentment, and grace of delineation, has given to us a rich heritage of incomparable works of art.

In the large gallery hang magnificent examples of Rubens, Rembrandt, and Vandyke, whose accomplished style and achievements inspired and instructed Reynolds and his contemporaries. How much our painters of the eighteenth century owed to the Flemish and Dutch masters is evidenced by the fact that the first President of the Royal Academy made a particular study of Rembrandt, while Gainsborough was equally loyal to Vandyke.

We shall recognise the pre-eminence of these accomplished men of the latter half of the eighteenth century, if we look at the work of such painters as Hudson, Hayman, and Thornhill, three of the best artists who

preceded them. Hogarth, who was pupil and son-in-law of Thornhill, stands to a great extent alone, for though in such pictures as his "Marriage à la mode" in the National Gallery his technique is as masterly as his invention and power of satirical insight is unique, his reputation rests very largely upon the plates engraved from his designs and paintings, most of them wrought by himself.

Reynolds and his school took up painting where it had been left by the seventeenth century masters, and their first concern was to get as near to those men as they could, while giving expression to their own individuality.

A rich palette of colour, rapid and dexterous brush work, and light concentrated upon certain parts only of the picture, while the surroundings lay in shadow, was what they found in the canvases of Rembrandt and Vandyke, while in Rubens there was a suavity and breadth of treatment, combined with most surprising skill in rapidly covering a large canvas with an opulent design, that still astonishes and delights the student and connoisseur. These magnates in the world of art had a supreme gift for seeing and depicting men and women as they live, so that the mastery they display in the use of materials and their fertility of resource compel universal admiration.

Accepting the conventions of their predecessors, and their methods of regarding and presenting nature, the

giant painters of the latter years of the eighteenth century, who added such lustre to Great Britain, caught up the mantles of those earlier exponents, and worked on in a spirit and power that was their own, with such grand and permanent results as are displayed on the walls of Hertford House, and examples of whose work adorn these pages.

Some may object to treating painters as "bricklayers," and regarding them as high-class workmen; yet the way the thing is done—"hints of the proper craft, tricks of the tool's true play," as Browning puts it—is what the critic had best speak upon: the meaning, the intention, the message of the artist may carry one too far into the realms of fancy and romance.

CHAPTER II

THE GREAT PAINTERS OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

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THE Wallace Collection at Hertford House is rich in examples of the great school of British portraiture, and as these pictures are hung in juxtaposition, an exceptional opportunity is afforded for comparing the methods of Reynolds, Gainsborough, and Romney. Mary Robinson, a celebrated model of that time, is seen here as limned by these three masters. In judging between their different renderings of Mistress Mary, the Perdita of George IV. when Prince of Wales, the palm must go to Gainsborough for one of the loveliest of his many delineations of beautiful women. No finer work has come down to us from the brush of that great Suffolk painter.

It is plain that he was captivated by the fascinating woman whose short career reads now like some deftly-woven romance, and that he lavished all the resources of his art in making her live upon his canvas. She is seated on a bank, and a dark group of trees

are a telling foil to the pink and white of her skin and the gauzy daintiness of her costume.

The artist contrives to suggest some appropriate story, for Perdita is holding a miniature in her right hand, which rests easily on her lap, while her gaze is projected into the world of dreams and far-away imaginings. The painter has represented her in a quiet and unconscious moment, "in maiden meditation, fancy free."

The sentiment is saved from any taint of affectation by a rare delicacy of treatment. Gainsborough seldom went so far in that direction as did Romney, and though probably Mary Robinson interested him as much while painting her as Emma Hart did Romney, it was no such absorbing passion as upsets the mental balance, but an artistic interest in a beautiful woman, about whom the world of fashion was doubtless gossiping.

Mary Robinson's career as Perdita, mistress of the Prince of Wales, novelist, dramatist, and model gives subject for thought, for though in her forty-two years of life she played all these many parts, and received an amount of attention that made her one of the most notorious women of the time, yet her last days were little better than those of her contemporary, Emma Hart (Lady Hamilton), for she died crippled and impoverished in 1800. The one child of her marriage lived for another eighteen years, dying at about the

same age as that reached by her mother, whose memoirs she helped to put in shape for publication.

Her father, the captain of a Bristol whaler, seems to have left her and her mother to shift for themselves, with the result that Mary's education was scrappy and superficial. Through the dancing-master at her last school she was introduced to Garrick. The great actor was struck by her appearance and somewhat precocious talent in reciting verses, and would have given her an engagement but for her marriage at the age of sixteen to an articled clerk, who was thought to have expectations, but who at the end of two years was imprisoned for debt.

Her poems were published under the patronage of the Duchess of Devonshire in 1775, and the year following she made her début as Juliet, Garrick giving her the benefit of his experience. For four years she played with marked success at Drury Lane. Her striking figure, shown to advantage in the men's clothes she frequently assumed, captivated the Prince of Wales. Securing a bond for £20,000 from "Florizel," as the Prince signed himself, to "Perdita," one of her favourite parts, she became the acknowledged mistress of one who soon showed his fickleness by throwing her over and refusing to redeem the bond.

Burdened with debt and on the brink of disaster, she was granted by Fox a pension of £500 a year, half of which sum was to go to her daughter on her

death. She lived for some time in Paris, and then settled in Brighton, where she could still be near the world of fashion, possibly in the hope that her whilom royal lover might again bestow his favours on her. Her name was coupled with Fox and also with Colonel Thisleton, an officer in the English army in America, who seems to have been in financial straits. It was during a journey undertaken on his behalf that Mary Robinson contracted the illness which caused a partial paralysis of her legs.

She then devoted herself to literature, and produced during the next few years domestic stories, sonnets, novels, and general journalism, her reputation securing for her work some popularity; but her claim to permanent remembrance rests upon the rôle of model, which enabled the great painters of the day to give us the counterfeit presentment of one who in her time played many parts, but none with notable effect.

The picture was probably painted when she was playing with such success at Drury Lane Theatre, at the age of twenty-four or thereabouts, and it was a chance not to be missed. Gainsborough was a frequenter of the Green Room, where he may have been introduced to her by Garrick.

This charming portrait gives us Mary in a pensive mood, before the bloom, simplicity, and innocence of youth had been brushed away by contact with the world of gallants, paint, powder, and patches. In this

respect it is in marked and agreeable contrast with the other two versions in this gallery, which present Perdita as a woman of fashion, with both a career and a reputation behind her.

Romney's portrait shows us a woman of riper years, and the wondering childlike innocence of Gainsborough's *ingénue* gives place to an assured and ripened *savoir-faire.*

This Perdita might be about to step into her chair to meet her royal lover in the Mall, or at Ranelagh, or wherever their trysting-place might be. Hers is the latest coiffure; a hat is perched upon a mass of hair gathered upon the head, and the expression on her face, as she turns to catch a glimpse of the man in the street, bespeaks the woman accustomed to applause, the beauty who lived to be looked at—quite another figure to that set by Gainsborough in a landscape, with no hint of notoriety or the demi-monde.

Reynolds' portrait has more in common with Romney's than with Gainsborough's, and is the least pleasing of the three. It has, however, an interest of its own, for it shows either the change which a few years made in Mary Robinson's appearance, or with what different eyes two men may look at the same subject. No doubt so scheming a woman would be very varied in her moods, and could succeed in being many things to many people. She sat constantly to Sir Joshua about 1782, the date of this picture in Hertford House; and looking out as she is across the sea, her

thoughts away from the present to the past, we may imagine the pose to have been suggested by the royal lover's abandonment of her.

Hers was a type that lent itself to picturesque portraiture, and the many versions we possess prove that she, in common with her famous contemporary Emma Hart, was a welcome subject in the best studios of the day. As she is posed by Reynolds in a somewhat commonplace attitude, other examples from his brush have been selected for reproduction here.

The "handling," as artists say, referring to the way the colour is brushed on, is in each case typical of these three contemporary painters, and as the way a thing is done is naturally of considerable interest to us "tool-using animals," as Carlyle dubbed mankind, it is worth our while to look at the three canvases from this point of view.

Taking Gainsborough first, we see that the general tone is cooler than in either of the other canvases, for he had a penchant for blue, and loved to introduce it in his work. Yet the balance between cool and warm tones is perfectly preserved, so that a subtle silvery grey is the impression one receives, the grey that, as Browning says, "silvers everything." The colours themselves are so floated on to the canvas as to seem aerial in quality, with no suggestion of pigments.

Gainsborough used much medium, which enabled him to apply his colours thinly, and as the paint is solid

enough in certain parts, this play of transparent and opaque effects gives to the picture a bloom and charm such as we find in the works of no other painter. At his best Gainsborough has produced consummate examples of sweetness and grace that have never been equalled.

Reynolds may be said to appeal rather to the head, Gainsborough to the heart, Romney to the sentiment of the beholder; but to the Suffolk painter alone belongs a certain charm, which is akin to the touching effect of some surpassing strain of music on the senses, so that his lifelong devotion to the sister art seems to find expression in his pictures.

The very way that he employs colour shows that he would fain escape the trammels of material paint, and dip his brush in rainbow hues, to secure a lost-and-found quality, and impart mystery and charm, by the merging of one plane on to another, so that definition is secured without defining. He brushes on the tints with a sort of insolent freedom and mastery assurance which secures success, yet always keeps, as Thackeray said, "on the brink."

We are much impressed by the quick dexterity of two or three living exhibitors at the Royal Academy, but when these present-day works have been mellowed by 130 years' exposure to light and dust, we may well suppose that they will be tamer in quality and technique than these eighteenth-century examples in the Wallace Collection.

Gainsborough was a great landscape painter—it was in that rôle that Reynolds eulogised him in his "Discourse"—and though he found it difficult to dispose of these works, he was particularly successful in introducing landscape backgrounds into his portraits. This he does in such a way that they set off the sitter without claiming too much attention to themselves. The slight unfinished look of these backgrounds, as some may see them, is a quality not easy to secure, for the attention must not be directed from the sitter, as is apt to be the case where the necessary balance between the several parts of the picture is not preserved. If we fix our eyes upon a face we only take in the landscape in a very general way, and this is just what Gainsborough secures.

Photography supports the truth of this, for if we focus for the head the background will be lost to a great extent, no details being secured on the plate. What, therefore, may be considered as unfinished on a hasty view, is really that judicious selection which marks the cultivated eye.

CHAPTER III

GAINSBOROUGH

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GAINSBOROUGH

GAINSBOROUGH was guided by a nice taste, a gift shared with his rivals, and in his "Perdita" we see the unstudied pose and absence of self-consciousness which it is so difficult to maintain in a series of sittings, and the appearance of spontaneous and inspired creation which is not easily carried through by work which has to efface the footsteps of work. To secure this look of happy accident very strenuous endeavour must be allied to infinite pains—Sheridan's "damned hard writing to make easy reading"—and all such emprise needs the master hand and mind.

Another Gainsborough hangs alongside his "Perdita," the lovely full-length portrait of a young girl, Miss Haverfield.

How did this great artist acquire his skill? Nowadays an Academy student takes his six years' course at Burlington House, and studies in Paris or some other city on the continent. Much attention is paid to anatomy and to drawing from the antique. So far

as is recorded Gainsborough's course of study was short and unpromising. His father, a Suffolk man of business, wished the future R.A. to go into his spinning-mill. The lad left Sudbury in 1742, at the age of fifteen, and was for a time under the French engraver Gravelot, a skilful handler of the burin, who taught his pupil how to use the etching needle. He next served a sort of apprenticeship under Francis Hayman, a painstaking worker but no genius, who was one of the first Royal Academicians, a friend of Hogarth, Quin the actor, and other "Vagabonds" of the time, and who died in 1776. Many of his works decorated Vauxhall Gardens. Gainsborough started on his own account in Hatton Garden, painting landscapes for dealers, and portraits at from three to five guineas apiece, as well as modelling animals, and returned to Sudbury in 1745 owing to want of success, so that the teaching he received cannot have amounted to much.

He was always sketching from nature, and his skill as a landscape painter was entirely due to this, but as he found no sale for these productions, and stacks of such canvases encumbered the hall of his London house, he had to follow the sure and lucrative calling of portrait-painter. Marrying at the age of twenty, he settled for a time in Ipswich, and ten years later, in 1760, he was advised to try his fortunes at Bath, a move which led to much profitable work. His rent was £50 a year, and having at first charged from five

PORTRAIT OF MRS. ROBINSON (PERDITA)

By Gainsborough

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to eight guineas, he raised his price to forty guineas for a half-length and a hundred guineas for a full-length. Living a simple life with his wife and two daughters, and amusing his leisure with music, he stayed at Bath fourteen years, when, with improved income, he came to London in 1774, took a portion of Schomberg House at a rental of £300 a year, and lived there until his death in 1788.

He was one of the foundation members of the Royal Academy, but took no active part in its management, and owing to some disagreement about the hanging of his picture he ceased to exhibit after 1783.

The jealousy between Gainsborough and Reynolds has often been enlarged upon, but the want of friendliness was as much Gainsborough's fault as Reynolds', who did call upon his rival when he came to town, a courtesy not returned by the Suffolk painter. In disposition the two men were not alike, and while the President of the newly created Academy was in a sense a leader of fashion and a man about town, who frequented masquerades and other fashionable resorts, Gainsborough either spent his evenings with his family, or cultivated the society of Bohemians, such as Quin and Foote, and Fischer the hautboy player, afterwards his son-in-law.

Reynolds has left a touching account of his visit to Gainsborough, who on his deathbed wrote to express his acknowledgments for the good opinion

Reynolds entertained of his abilities and the manner in which he had always spoken of him, and to express a wish to see him once more before he died. The impression left by the meeting upon the President was that Gainsborough's regret at leaving life was principally a regret at leaving his work, especially as he began, he said, to realise his deficiencies, which he flattered himself were in some measure supplied in his last works. Gainsborough was suddenly struck down by fatal disease at the age of sixty-two, whereas Reynolds had ceased to paint during the last two years of his life. "If any little jealousies," says the President, "had subsisted between us, they were forgotten in those moments of sincerity;" and the dying painter whispered to him, "We are all going to heaven, and Vandyck is of the party."

We obtain a few glimpses of Gainsborough from Philip Thicknesse, who knew him for many years, and persuaded him to try his fortune at Bath, and who says, "He possessed least of that worldly knowledge, to enable him to make his own way into the notice of the great world."

As an instance of the painter's impulsiveness he records that when Mrs. Thicknesse agreed to part with her *Viol da Gamba* for her husband's portrait, Gainsborough was so transported by his present that he exclaimed, "Keep me hungry! keep me hungry! Do not send the instrument till I have finished the picture."

On another occasion when painting an alderman, who desired the artist not to overlook the dimple in his chin, Gainsborough burst out laughing, threw his pencil on the ground, and said, "Damn the dimple in your chin! I can neither paint that nor your chin neither;" and never touched the picture more. When a certain duchess sent to know the reason why her picture was not sent home, he gave it a wipe in the face with his background brush and sent word that her face was too hard for him, he could not paint it.

Thicknesse mentions the astonishing rapidity of his work. One of his finest portraits, that of his nephew Dupont, was painted in one sitting of an hour!

His biographer implies that Mrs. Gainsborough was all too careful about small matters, and if her husband took a coach he had to be set down some distance off, so that she should not know of the extravagance. Her parsimony often drove him into small excesses and absences from home; yet when all is said on the human side Gainsborough had a very lovable, happy nature. A man of no guile, and, though impulsive, ever ready to forgive and forget, he lived in and for his art, to perfect which was the chief concern of his life, and that he was able to carry this very far his two canvases at Hertford House bear witness eloquently.

In a rare book entitled "Sketches of Character,"

published in 1770, and thought to be by Thicknesse, occur the following paragraphs:—

"Nature was his (Gainsborough's) master, for he had none other! He caught his ideas with wonderful quickness, and executed them with the utmost facility. With a black lead-pencil he is equal to any of the greatest Masters of Antiquity; and, though Landscape painting is his natural turn, he has exceeded all the modern Portrait Painters, being the only one who paints the mind equally as strong as the countenance."

"Mr. G. not only paints the face, but finishes with his own hands every part of the drapery; this, however trifling matter it may appear to some, is of as great importance to the picture as it is fatigue and labour to the artist. The other eminent Painters either cannot, or will not be at that trouble."

CHAPTER IV

SIR JOSHUA REYNOLDS

CHAPTER IV

SIR JOSHUA REYNOLDS

THE qualities that make Reynolds eminent in the British School are well displayed at Hertford House. We speak of him as a portrait-painter, as though his range was limited because he followed what Horace Walpole called the commonplace side of painting; but in truth the first President of the Royal Academy made his sitters his models, and thus transfigured what in weaker hands is mechanical into imaginative work. It is by such pictures as "Nelly O'Brien," "Miss Bowles," and "Mrs. Carnac" that Reynolds shows the resources of his art, rather than in those few canvases he was induced to paint in what was then looked upon as the great School of "Historical Composition," a type at once artificial, exaggerated, and wanting in humanity. Striving to be impressive it was merely grandiose, and to become dramatic it ignored the chief canon of Art, simplicity.

Reynolds was painting history that is instinct with life when he seized every opportunity afforded

by his sitters for expressing his sense of the pictorial; he perfected his work by the pose of his figures, the arrangement of masses, and the subtlety and effectiveness of the chiaroscuro, and thus he produced those masterpieces which enrich the art treasures of the world. When he laid himself out to be "pictorial" and to paint a "composition," he rose little above mediocrity; his self-consciousness seemed to master him, his work became stagey and quite unmoving, so that it seems unfair to his memory to qualify the title painter with the prefix "portrait."

What picture could be more exquisite in sentiment, composition, and æsthetic beauty than that of the little girl clasping her dog closely, which goes by the name of "Miss Bowles"; or the portrait of "Nelly O'Brien" here reproduced.

This picture was painted in 1762, as entries in the pocket-book of the year tell, when the painter was forty. It was so busy a year with Reynolds that he was able to double his prices, charging seventy guineas for a half-length. Nelly was a favourite sitter, and she and Kitty Fisher seem to have acted as professional models. Both women were fashionable courtesans of the day, the former under the protection of Bolingbroke.

As we gradually take in with close inspection the qualities of this picture, we shall find that the painter has grappled with all the difficulties of a complicated scheme of lighting. The shadow cast by the hat over

PORTRAIT OF NELLY O'BRIEN

By Sir Joshua Reynolds

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the face and neck, relieved by splashes of light on the side of the neck and bosom, is a triumph of management which can only be fully appreciated by an artist. A figure set in full light against a dark background is a scheme simple compared with a face shown in the mystery of shadow, as in the "Nelly O'Brien."

The portrait "Lady Frances Seymour" was painted twenty years later. It is a good example of the broad natural handling of a man certain of his methods, who could therefore work with rapid ease, for the amount of work the painter turned out in a week, allowing for the help he received from his four or five assistants, is proof that his celerity has never been excelled.

Reynolds was a great admirer of Rembrandt, and this master of light and shade taught the English painter how to arrange his masses of dark, half tone, and light; how to let them play into each other with assured relief and effect, and with that "lost-and-found" quality which is so much desired in the sun-pictures of to-day. The result is seen in engravings from the works of these eighteenth-century painters, which are so effective and strongly dramatic in their light and shade when translated into black and white. In this the writer speaks from experience, having mezzotinted works by Reynolds and Romney. It is the lack of these vital qualities in the canvases of modern painters which makes the engravings after them comparatively ineffective.

The handling of Reynolds is easy, vigorous, and solid, the colour is brushed on with decision and freshness, but he had not that swiftness of touch which is characteristic of Gainsborough, nor the knack of thin painting on which his great rival relied. His modelling is therefore stronger, and, so to speak, more brutal than Gainsborough's. His success in depicting childhood is evidence that his eye for the nuances of beauty was rapid and penetrating, and his finger dexterity was such that he placed his "vision" on the canvas with a certainty that has never been excelled. For quick work we must think of Rubens as his rival, but great as was his output, we learn from note-books in the possession of the Royal Academy that the President gave much thought to arrangement, and very thoroughly schemed out each picture before he put brush to canvas.

He was as skilful with men as with women, developing alike grace, beauty, and character; while in the portrayal of children and babies—take "Mrs. Hoare and Infant" as an instance—no one has ever surpassed him, for he gives the chubby unconscious innocence of babyhood, which so many have in vain essayed to reproduce.

That three great portrait-painters should have been working in London at the same time has put them into somewhat unfair rivalry, as has been the case also when a galaxy of great writers have been contemporaries. Our comparison here is not instituted to prove the preeminence of one, but to see wherein their methods

differed, and to note and distinguish their several gifts.

Reynolds had the widest training; for, though Hudson was no better artist than Hayman, the future President studied the Italian masters in their own country from 1749 to 1752—between the ages of twenty-six and twenty-nine—when he had acquired some skill and reputation, and was able to profit to the full by this advantage, and by these years spent in copying old masters, as the work produced immediately after his return, and thenceforward throughout his life, evidences. As a draughtsman, from a scientific point of view, he was shallow, but he had the skill to hide his shortcomings, and an eye trained by long use to see proportion, and make the most of what was before him. Had he been a good anatomist, his work might have lacked that picturesque human quality which is its chief charm.

To acquire the technique which so distinguished him Reynolds had in his gallery a good collection of examples by his favourite painters, and he went so far as to scrape some of them to see if he could find out how the great masters worked. Rarely a day passed without Reynolds using his brush, and some of his finest works were produced during his last decade. He gave up the practice of his calling before his hand showed any sign of failing, an example unfortunately not followed by several modern Academicians. It was while working at the Vatican

that he caught the cold which brought on his permanent deafness.

There is a robustness, an intellectual strength, even a literary quality in Reynolds' pictures, which is less felt in those of his two rivals, and without doubt he maintained a high level of excellence which they failed to reach. On the other hand we may single out works by Romney which touch us more intimately, and make more appeal to our emotions, than Reynolds ever does, just as for sweetness and delicacy Gainsborough at times surpasses him.

We see the work in the man, for Reynolds cultivated the society of great writers, the vigorous intellects of his day; and while he gathered round him such entirely sane companions as Johnson, Burke, and Malone, Romney was spending his summers with Hayley as a fellow-guest, with Blake the visionary, Cowper the poet, and Flaxman the pseudo-Greek sculptor. Gainsborough meanwhile was a musician, delighting to foregather with artists and "Vagabonds," and eschewing those distinctly intellectual pursuits that Reynolds assiduously cultivated; but then Reynolds was a bachelor with no home ties, whereas the Suffolk master, who had married when a boy, was at his happiest with his wife and daughters.

Sir Joshua Reynolds, to give him his full title, may be said to have played the game of life with complete success, holding his emotions well under control during a career which was as one long march of triumph to the

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PORTRAIT OF LADY FRANCES SEYMOUR,
COUNTESS OF LINCOLN

By Sir Joshua Reynolds

end. An ideal first President of the newly founded Academy of Fine Arts, from its start in 1768 till his retirement enforced by sight-failure in 1789, he contributed no less than 245 works to its annual exhibitions, and these were but a few of the canvases he covered. He could only accomplish such a mass of work by the aid of assistants, a practice that does not seem to have been followed by Gainsborough or Romney.

Few men have lived a fuller life than Reynolds, for his popularity as a painter was on a par with his renown as host and man of the world, while the "Discourses," which he delivered to the Academy students from 1769 to 1790, will always have a place on the shelves of men of letters. In marked contrast to these lectures on art, which are typical of the literary spirit of the day, are the racy, direct, devil-may-care letters so characteristic of Gainsborough; while Romney was never able, owing to imperfect education, to express himself with the pen, though in his manner and personality there was no defect.

We expect Reynolds, as the son of a schoolmaster at Plympton, Devon, to have been better educated than either of his rivals. That he valued the power of expressing himself with the pen is shown in his "Discourses," and in three papers he contributed at Johnson's request to *The Idler*, Nos. 76, 79, and 82. These are interesting attempts to define his attitude towards art. Speaking of critics he says: "There is a

kind of critic who judges by narrow rules, and those too often false, and which, though they should be true, and founded on nature, will lead him but a very little way towards a just estimation of the sublime beauties in works of genius; for whatever part of an art can be exercised or criticised by rules, that part is no longer the work of genius which implies excellence out of the reach of rules" (evidently a tilt at those who always drag in *Canons of Art*), "so instead of giving up the reins of their imagination into their Author's hands, their frigid minds are employed in examining whether the performance be in accordance to the rules of Art."

As to its being a mission of painting to imitate Nature, he says: "If the excellency of a painter consisted only in the imitation, Painting must lose its rank, and be no longer considered as a liberal art, and sister to Poetry. The painter of genius cannot stoop to drudgery in which the understanding has no part; and what pretence has the art to claim kindred with poetry but its power over the imagination? To this power the painter of genius directs him, in this sense he studies Nature, and often arrives at his end even by being unnatural in the confined sense of the word. The grand style of Painting requires this minute attention to be carefully avoided, and must be kept as separate from it as the style of Poetry from that of History."

CHAPTER V

ROMNEY

CHAPTER V

ROMNEY

FROM a psycho-biological point of view the life of Romney is fascinating. His start in life was altogether unpropitious, for at the age of twenty-two he married a girl who was at home from service, and who had nursed him through a serious illness while lodging at her mother's house. Margaret Burr brought young Gainsborough a comfortable income, but Romney's wife had to return to service after her marriage, and sent her husband an occasional half-guinea out of her wages, concealed under the seal on the envelope. After poor success at Kendal, Romney came to London in 1762 at the age of twenty-eight, and seems to have seen his wife but at rare intervals until two years before his death in 1802.

His talent was inborn, and was assisted by but little training. During the desultory years between youth and manhood, when he was with his father as cabinet-maker's apprentice, and clever enough at the craft to make a violin, he astonished the workmen by

sketching them; and at last, perhaps in desperation at his shiftlessness, Romney *père* put him at the age of nineteen under Steel, a local artist of some skill, but of loose morals. Here he seems to have aroused his master's jealousy, and four years later we find him working on his own account. He had gone to York with Steel, who gauged his powers and predicted the brilliant future to which he attained. Acquiring facility by constant exercise of his art, he probably owed less to outside influences than either of his contemporaries. But for a brief visit to Rome in 1773 he must have developed his genius chiefly by self-culture.

His method partakes of the thin handling of Gainsborough, and yet possesses a solidity and breadth of treatment more akin to Reynolds, as the example here reproduced attests. This picture, "Mrs. Robinson," is characteristic of the painter, for its happy suggestion of movement so successfully caught. "Perdita" might be just about to step into her chair, and in many of Romney's canvases we find this clever expression of arrested movement. This appears in many of the versions of Emma Hart, afterwards Lady Hamilton, the model who most forcibly inspired him, and was the object of his deep regard. For some years he painted her constantly, now as "Nature," now as "A Bacchante," now as "A Girl Spinning," devoting himself, to the exclusion of others, to his fair model. Charles Greville, whose mistress she was, brought her

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PORTRAIT OF MRS. ROBINSON (PERDITA)
By Romney

to the painter, and a friendship sprang up between them which endured until she went to Naples as the wife of Sir W. Hamilton.

The following extract from one of the few letters Romney wrote is interesting in this connection. It is dated August 8, 1791. "In the evening of that day there were collected several people of fashion to hear her sing. She performed, both in the serious and comic, to admiration, both in singing and acting; but her Nina surpasses everything I ever saw, and I believe as a piece of acting nothing ever surpassed it. The whole company were in an agony of sorrow. Her acting is simple, grand, terrible, and pathetic. My mind was so much heated that I was for running down to Eastbourne to fetch you up to see her. But, alas, soon after I thought I perceived an alteration in her conduct to me. A coldness and neglect seemed to have taken the place of her repeated declarations of regard for me. . . . I expect them" (Sir William Hamilton and Emma) "the latter end of this week, when my anxiety (for I have suffered much) will be either relieved or increased, as I find her conduct." In a letter of May 29 he concludes: "Really, my mind had suffered so very much that my health was much affected, and I was afraid I should not have had power to have painted any more from her; but since she has resumed her former kindness my health and spirits are quite recovered."

From the time that he settled in London in 1775 Romney divided the town with Reynolds, and as "the man in Cavendish Square," as the President curtly termed him, made £3000 a year, it is evident that he had many patrons, as his prices were from fifty to a hundred and twenty guineas. He would have nothing to do with the newly constituted Academy, and nearly a century elapsed before any work of his hung on its walls. There was little in common between the two masters; Reynolds, with his well-balanced common-sense, probably thought Romney a weak sentimentalist, an estimate that was justified when, as years went by, the emotional nature of the painter deepened, until a mental collapse ensued. Romney returned broken in mind and body to the wife whom he had long neglected, and she nursed him tenderly until his death in 1802.

Romney was a very strenuous worker, and as there were few interests outside his art, we find him putting in long days, and that for weeks at a stretch, before his easel. It was his custom to have sitters from ten till four, his lunch being a cup of broth or some slight repast. He dined at four, and then went for a walk, and on his return he took up the sketch he had worked upon before his first sitter came, and in this way he occupied himself until bedtime. He was a rapid worker, painting some of his finest portraits in four sittings.

CHAPTER VI

GREUZE

CHAPTER VI

GREUZE

NO gallery is so rich in examples of Jean Baptiste Greuze as the Wallace Collection, which has the further distinction of showing this painter in his varied moods, as he adapted his style to suit the fashions of the day. He knew well how to trim his sails to catch the prevailing breeze of popularity, until advancing years had stereotyped his methods, so that he could not adapt them to the new mode that came in with the Revolution. Thus the master, whose works now command immense prices, and who was doubtless envied by his contemporaries, outlived his vogue, and was allowed to drop out of notice and to die in poverty.

The work by which Greuze is best known is that in which he combines, in a way that is all his own, the innocence of girlhood with a sentimental and voluptuous charm that happily is not true to life. If we compare his young girls with those painted by such British artists of his day as Reynolds and Romney, we shall find that Greuze makes but slight effort

to realise his models. This was not because he could not do so, for he was an admirable portrait-painter, but because he found a sentimental quality successful from a selling point of view, and was then led on a step further, so that he gives us Bacchantes of an age that should suggest mere childish innocence.

This travesty of virtue, this cunning combination of youthfulness and ripe maturity which he delighted in, is intensely painful to some, who are disposed to undervalue the better side of his art because of this tendency to double-entendre. We may, no doubt, attribute this weakness to the widespread false sentiment of the age, for we find in his subject-pieces, such as "Filial Piety" and "The Votive Offering," a wholly unconvincing attitude towards life. The moral aspect of such pictures is correct enough; but it is as possible to be immoral even on virtue's side if the point of view is false, if the life portrayed is a mere pose or self-delusion, as it is by broad suggestion.

We have not hitherto had occasion to speak of the moral aspect of painting, but it forces itself upon us as we study the work of such men as Greuze and his contemporary, Fragonard. Though it has been held that Art is neither moral nor immoral, by those who say that such considerations are outside its province, the subject must at times confront us. Even if it may not seem open to discussion, we cannot wonder when people, who rightly attach great im-

ESPIÈGLERIE

BY GREUZE

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portance to conduct, bring their moral foot-rule to measure a canvas by it, and disclaim the doctrine of "Art for Art's sake."

Those who may object to Greuze's point of view should not allow this to blind them to his high merits as a painter. Where some of us part company with these severe moralists is that while they would burn "A Bacchante," they would put "Filial Piety" in a Sunday school. "A Bacchante" is at the worst only suggestive to an easily receptive mind; to the pure all things are pure. A wrong way of looking at life, a false standard of virtue, an impossible attitude of goodness, may do much more harm, if we are to weigh such issues, than a work which can only suggest evil to those who bring to the inspection a mental attitude which is adapted to meet the painter half-way. Those words of Hood will illustrate the point:—

> "A man may cry Church! church! at every word,
> With no more piety than other people;
> A daw's not reckoned a religious bird
> Because it keeps a-cawing from a steeple."

"To hold the mirror up to nature; to show virtue her own image," pretty well sums up all that can be said definitely as to the moral mission of Art, for so soon as one begins to formulate principles, it is about as satisfactory as putting fluoric acid into glass bottles, where it very soon finds its way through the thinnest places.

We are on safer ground when we look at Greuze from a painter's point of view, and seek to discover what he went for and what he reached. Beyond all question he could paint an attractive head. He worked in a less frenzied and more deliberate fashion than the British painters of the time, who took as their models Rubens and Vandyck rather than the earlier Italian masters. His paint is not passionate if his subjects are, and he obtains the effect by careful manipulation and with none of that insolent indifference characteristic of Reynolds, who worked at fever heat to give us babyhood and an 'Age of Innocence!'

Greuze therefore pleases those whose idea of finish is a carefully laid surface, with all dash and brushing carefully concealed. Compare the way he paints an eye with the work of Gainsborough in "Miss Haverfield." The Frenchman paints it as though he were rendering a piece of still life. It is carefully modelled, and nothing is left to the imagination. The Englishman, on the other hand, sees a mysterious organ that can no more be mapped like a country or modelled like an egg than the actual surface can be imitated. He therefore tries to give us the impression it makes upon him; he is content to suggest the mystery of it all. He brushes on his paint with the most skilful direction and appreciation of the subtleties, but with a nervous swiftness that scorns delay.

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INNOCENCE

By Greuze

Greuze was thinking all the time of himself, of the intention he was giving to his work, and it must in fairness be said that the effort to put in the right amount of sentiment prevented that freedom of handling which is characteristic of the best workers of the British school. It follows that there is very little of that mastery over his material which makes Gainsborough one of the world's most famous painters.

We have seen how Rembrandt looked at everything through a veil of mystery. Greuze effectually tears down the veil, if indeed it ever existed for him, and to that extent, apart from other considerations, comes a long way down in the ranks of great painters. Still he certainly attained his aims and invested his work with a personality which hall-marks it, so that we recognise at once a canvas from his hand. Those, however, who claim for the French sentimentalist a prominent niche in the temple of fame do him an unkindness by such exaggeration, and may lead some to deny him a place there at all.

Of the three great British artists whose works we have considered, Romney, who met Greuze when in Paris, has the most in common with him. In the series of pictures painted from his favourite model, Emma Hart, he deliberately adopts a sentimental attitude, and though he never suggests the hothouse atmosphere of Greuze, Romney has much more of the self-consciousness we notice in the Frenchman than

either Gainsborough or Reynolds. These masters were in the main content to devote their powers to the realisation of their subject rather than to the expression of their feelings.

Lady Dilke, in her fine work "The French Painters of the Eighteenth Century," traces the influences that dominated Art when Greuze began his studies. He was born near Maçon in 1725, and from his eighth year amused himself with drawing, although his father at first opposed his inclinations. Greuze's earliest studies were under an obscure provincial painter, but eventually he made his way to Paris and studied in the Academy.

A reaction had set in against luxury and licence, and this was turned to account by Greuze. The most eloquent literary exponent of this reaction was Rousseau; Greuze became its interpreter, rather against his will, in that unending series of sentimental scenes which set before us those circumstances of domestic drama which Diderot attempted to put upon the stage. "Le Père de famille expliquient la Bible" (exhibited in 1755, and now in the Louvre), by which he startled the professors of the Royal Academy, or "L'Aveugle Trompé," might both serve as illustrations to the Moral Tales of Marmontel, and there can be no doubt that the works of Morland, Wheatley, and other painters over here, in which morality is garbed in affected sentimentality, were imported from France.

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STUDY OF GRIEF

By Greuze

Though the immense vogue of these domestic pieces had brought gain to the painter, the Academicians demanded scenes from classical history, and after repeated warnings Greuze was excluded from the Salon of 1767. He then produced what to us is one of the falsest and least convincing of his works, "Severus reproaching Caracalla," now in the Louvre, which he painted after a tour in Italy, where he seems to have received such marked attention as probably fostered his vanity and self-esteem.

Fortunately this excursion into classical paths, though accepted by the Academy, only gained him admission into the ranks of the genre or domestic painters, and so chagrined was he by this rebuff that he did not again exhibit until after the Revolution. He provoked the hostility of the Encyclopædists, who had hitherto supported him, because of this determination to pay homage to traditional conventions, instead of basing his claim to honour on his rendering of scenes of sublime morality.

An interesting portrait painted about this time is that of Robespierre, lent by Lord Rosebery to the Guildhall Exhibition recently. Greuze painted often from his wife, who was a beauty, but who seems to have been both dishonest and depraved, as appears from a document drawn up by her husband, "*Mémoire contre sa femme.*"

Greuze lost his savings in the disordered times

of the Revolution, and the classical style of David being now the only accepted one, a style he was too old to adopt, and having gained but few friends owing to his self-sufficient vanity, he became neglected, and for many years after his zenith his works went cheap. Eventually connoisseurs recognised his merits, and now none but those with long purses can hope to purchase a good example of his brush, should one come into an auction room. "The Girl with Doves" is thought to be the painter's masterpiece; it was exhibited when he was seventy-five, and is proof that his hand retained its cunning to the last.

Of the twenty-one examples of this master at Hertford House, the three here given show Greuze to advantage, though the one entitled "Sorrow" is in his most falsely sentimental vein. "Espièglerie" is perhaps the painter at his best, as he has just given innocence a *soupçon* of coquetry. His domestic pieces like "The Broken Mirror" and "Filial Piety" so overstep the modesty of nature, are so hyper-sentimental, as to be nauseating to some tastes; but as such considerations arise purely from the point of view, each person can be left to select what he will to praise or condemn.

CHAPTER VII

FRAGONARD

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FRAGONARD

RAGONARD has been called the last great decorator of the eighteenth century, and the de Goncourts, who are authorities on this period of French art, style him and Watteau the two poets in paint of that period. There is a dreamy tenderness about his work that is wanting in his master Boucher, who for virility of drawing and buoyant inventiveness is superior to him. He has neither the vision nor originality of Watteau, who was the inventor of Pastorales, Fêtes Champêtres, and Conversations Galantes, who died in 1721, eleven years before Jean Honoré Fragonard was born at Grasse. To him he owes much, either from direct study or through Boucher, who was much influenced by Watteau. He was the sort of student that Academies love, because in such the professors see the principles they are there to instil into the students carried into action.

Winning the Prix de Rome in 1752, Fragonard went to Italy, and the huge canvas in the Louvre,

"Le grand prêtre Corésus se sacrifie pour sauver Callirrhoé," was the expression of this phase of his art. Painters were expected to produce classical works on well-established lines, and Fragonard's is a fair sample of this sort; but an English visitor to the Louvre gets a surfeit of these subjects. This classicism is reflected in "The Fountain of Love" at Hertford House.

French art is trammelled to this day by these sorry traditions that have been passed on like spurious coins from age to age. We are not free from this bondage, though we no longer think that the only subjects worthy a painter's attention must be suggested by a classical dictionary; but a good deal of historical painting has very little more vitality or convincing force than Fragonard's classical composition, even when the event is more modern. It is very difficult to get the pulsating human quality into scenes which the inner consciousness has to build up, with the aid, perhaps, of contemporary documents; and without this human element the art cannot be said to live. Novelists have a similar difficulty in writing a story on a historical basis, and for one who succeeds, like Scott, in making his personages flesh and blood, a dozen fail because their historical equipment impedes the development of character.

It is strange to notice how artists love to tie themselves by rules and principles, as though they were

afraid of liberty. Think how long it was before dramatists disobeyed the unities of time and place; recall the anathemas hurled at Wagner for daring to be himself in lyrical drama; how long it was before sculptors took courage to see Nature for themselves, and not merely through the eyes of Phidias and Myron; how painters still attempt to be classical, and how even giants like Reynolds and Romney wasted time in this effort to be grand, by obeying a set of abstract canons that had all the force of anonymity. Had Fragonard lived when greater freedom was enjoyed, he would probably have worked in a less stilted manner, for in the example reproduced we have sentimentality within bounds, as well as an effective composition, the painting broad and vigorous, and the colour fresh.

He was a painter of variety, for there is a wide range of subject among his canvases at Hertford House; but the work most characteristic both of himself and of his time is seen in the two examples on the great staircase, "Cupids Sporting" and "Cupids Reposing," and in the series shown early in 1902 at the Guildhall Gallery. These are said to have been painted for Madame du Barry's pavilion. They were placed by the artist during the Reign of Terror in a friend's house at Grasse, and remained there until sold recently for £50,000. Here, where the whole scheme of decoration of a salon is designed and carried

out by Fragonard, we can estimate his position as the last of the great painters of the eighteenth century.

It is urged that such art as this always suggests loose morals, or no morality at all. The painter is certainly very frank in his rendering of certain phases of the gallantry of the day, as in "The Swing"; and if we are freer from moral obliquity now, we ought to put such work beside the other art of the time before we hold up our hands in pious horror. Hogarth was too concerned with studying the heart of things to become a mere decorator of salons; but had he essayed to do so we feel that he would have lacked the daintiness, spontaneity, and superficiality needed to please a royal courtesan or a voluptuous king, and instead of being pretty his work would have been brutal.

Hogarth offends directly by his coarseness; Fragonard by a suggestion of frailty in his women and voluptuousness in his men; and yet, as Mr. Stranahan says in his book on French art, these men succeed in giving to woman her coquetry and attraction, which is a charm far above physical beauty.

To invest vice with an air of virtue, and to clothe artificial sentiment in Arcadian simplicity, was natural to Fragonard. There are certain qualities of grace, delicacy of colour, ease of execution, and delightful abandon which are a valuable part of a painter's equipment, even if they serve no higher purpose than

LE CHIFFRE D'AMOUR (LOVE TOKEN)

BY FRAGONARD

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to make this world a very pleasant dwelling-place, and to thrust into the background the ills that flesh is heir to.

Such art is pagan in the sense that all allusion to death is carefully avoided, and if we pit it against the Christian art of the fourteenth and early part of the fifteenth century—for Raphael treated in a very pagan spirit subjects of a religious character—it shows up its limitations and superficiality; but then such works were designed as aids to worship and to promote piety, or at all events to inculcate the doctrines of the Church, whereas Fragonard was content to brighten the salon of a friend when he failed to please a courtesan, and his highest aim was to shoot folly as it flies.

It is a phase of art having much in common with Pope's "Rape of the Lock," and Thomson's "Castle of Indolence," and makes but little or no appeal to those whose taste is for the rugged and actual; but it has this of interest, that while those who gave us this art were little concerned with actuality, all unconsciously they reproduced the spirit of their age, so that we have in Watteau, Lancret, Boucher, Greuze, and Fragonard men who give to the body of the time its form and feature.

One recalls in this connection Lamb's defence of the Restoration dramatists from the charge of immorality, on the ground that the people they depict, and the world they create, are so far removed from real

life as to suggest no comparison with it, so that what these puppets do sets no example. This argument was demolished by Macaulay, but there is some reason in it, for the world of Fragonard's pictures is a land of phantasy: he dreamed of love in paint, and wrote poems to Venus in colour.

Work of men like this great decorator makes small appeal when detached from its surroundings and put pell-mell into a gallery, but when seen as the adornment of a salon, as there was opportunity recently at the Guildhall, the artist is not wronged by being judged from a false point of view. Lady Dilke has recorded the impression this salon at Grasse made upon her. "Fragonard was, I think, nowhere seen to the same advantage as in that silent room, which retained the carpet, the consoles, the tapestries, chairs, couches, and tabourets of his day; the furniture of which seemed, in short, to be just as it was when he painted his little 'Comedy of Love' [the subject of the painted panels]. The geraniums, the roses, the hollyhocks, which he employed on the smaller panels dividing his main subjects, allied themselves with the flowers and knotted ribbons of the carpet, and the fanciful garlands and festoons which adorned furniture that did not look as if it had been meant for use. There was just that touch of theatrical unreality in the surroundings which was in keeping with the style of Fragonard's own work . . . and reflected with an intimacy to which there is perhaps

no parallel, the manners and tone of the day. The style of Court fashions and customs, highly artificial even in their affectation and simplicity, the temper of society, purely sensual in spite of pretensions to sentiment, gave birth to innumerable fictions which took their place in the commerce of ordinary life. Eternal youth, perpetual pleasure, and all their wanton graces, their insincere airs masked by a voluptuous charm, came into seeming —a bright, deceitful vision which cheated and allured all eyes."

But how unfit for the commerce of our daily lives such a background! How out of key with the hurry of these petrol days, and motor-car whirl of modern life, in an atmosphere which made Watteau when he was in London in 1720 write: "*Le mauvais air qui règne à Londres a causé de la vapeur du charbon de terre dont on fait usage.*"

The message brought to us by this charming art is always of physical pleasure; of those joys of the senses which found their most graceful and most complete expression in the adorable mirage of the "Fête galante." This pregnant remark of Lady Dilke's is worth bearing in mind when we come to this phase of French art, that ended with the death of Fragonard a year after that of Greuze. The all-powerful David was the art dictator when Fragonard returned to Paris after the Revolution from his exile at Grasse, and these cold, correct "masterpieces," from which we now turn aside in

boredom as we walk through the Louvre, made the art of Fragonard appear so trumpery that no one was willing to patronise the painter of such airy nothings.

A new society had taken the place of the old régime, and the painter of "Le Chiffre d'Amour" and his friend Greuze, being no longer able to minister to the wants of the day, had to witness the triumph of David and his friends under the patronage of "Le Petit Caporal," while they were pushed aside to make room for these upstarts. We can picture to ourselves these two once successful painters, upon whom fortune had in their heyday showered her favours, sitting outside some café in a faubourg of old Paris, the one nearing eighty while his companion in neglect was six years his junior, sipping their daily modicum of thin wine, as they moralised on the mutability of life and the turn of fortune's wheel, which in their extreme old age condemned them to obscure poverty. They who had devoted great talents to painting *la joie de vivre*—pandering to a depraved taste, say some—to be judged and found wanting when the old order had given place to the new!

No joy of life was left them as they neared the end of their journey, when ease is looked forward to as the crown to a life of labour.

CHAPTER VIII

MEISSONIER

CHAPTER VIII

MEISSONIER

THERE can be no greater contrast in painting to the work of Greuze and Fragonard than we find in turning from their affectations to the uncompromising realism — fidelity to the thing seen—on the small canvases of Jean Louis Ernest Meissonier, who was born nine years after the death of Fragonard. The influences surrounding his studentship were those of the classicism that came in after the Revolution, which finds its fullest expression in the work of David, familiar to visitors to the Louvre.

Size with this school was a necessary accompaniment to success, and we find in consequence that French painters a century ago were never content unless they had an acre of canvas at their disposal. Even to-day in the Salon in Paris, whenever a representative collection of modern work is to be seen, the pictures run large —far larger than at our own Academy.

Meissonier seems to have set his face against this

fashion of huge canvases—which associated size with greatness—and apart from other qualities he won distinction by the smallness of his paintings, which he contrived, however, to cover with as much work as would have filled a Salon in the hands of men like Vernet. By thus going to the opposite extreme, Meissonier secured attention that might not have been his, for we must think of these small, wonderfully wrought pictures amid canvases running up to twenty and thirty feet wide, and not as on the walls of Burlington House, where a large canvas is the exception.

The English Government is not a patron of art as is the French. A clever young painter in Paris hopes to have placed on his work *acheté par l'état*, and as these purchases largely go to town halls, mairies, and other public buildings, size undoubtedly does count with the judges.

An inspection, when opportunity arises, of the sixteen Meissoniers hung at Hertford House will go far to explain and justify the wide popularity of this great master of effect and detail, whom some critics rate little higher than a painter of still life.

It requires no great amount of prescience to see that perfection of hand cunning will always command esteem. Meissonier does in paint what those Flemish carvers of the seventeenth century did in boxwood, on so minute a scale that it still remains a marvel for all

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SOLDIERS GAMBLING

By Meissonier

time how such work could be accomplished. There is an example of this work in Hertford House, but the finest collection in the world of this minute craftsmanship is in the Waddesdon room at the British Museum. The painter concentrates on a canvas, $7\frac{1}{2} \times 9\frac{1}{4}$ inches, two figures on horseback, a girl at the inn door, fowls on the road, with a charming peep of the country; and all is put in with a realism that is a triumph of brush-work.

The subject itself is trite enough, and neither touches our sentiment nor compels our sympathy, and were it wrought on a larger scale, the size which most men who essay this class of subject affect, it might fail to win the regard shown for this tiny canvas. Those who see it for the first time are straightway amazed at its execution, for the painter has succeeded in putting so many minute touches on without showing any trace of the way it is done.

There are subject miniatures in the Wallace Collection on a yet smaller scale, and with work that is astonishingly minute, but they do not touch us as do these canvases by Meissonier, for we feel that the work on these ivories is microscopic and highly stippled; we expect it in fact, and finding it, admire and pass on. Our interest is not aroused as it is by the Meissoniers, and this is proof that there are some other qualities than mere trick of the fingers, mere pictorial legerdemain. There are human qualities in Meissonier's work that awaken our interest, such as we fail to find in

the miniatures that make no pretence to reveal the objects as they strike the eye, but only as they were in the habit of being treated.

Meissonier again, working in oils, had a less tractable material to manipulate than the water-colour painters on ivory, and work in his case *does* efface the footsteps of work, for if one looks into these tiny pictures there is no feeling of niggling or minute labour, but on the contrary, ease and directness—breadth of handling, as artists say.

Miniaturists, as a rule, deliberately work in stipple, and produce their effects by a multiplication of touches which one could count under a magnifying glass. Not so Meissonier, who works with as much directness and *apparent* freedom as the painter of large canvases.

Take his "Soldiers Gambling." Here we have an elaborate composition with many figures on a panel $8\frac{1}{4} \times 10\frac{3}{8}$! The small scale on which it is wrought does not prevent the painter from getting concentrated expression on the faces, with a sense of drama that gives unity to the work—that suggestion of movement which turns the models into men whose doings interest us. And yet some writers tell us that it is use of the lay-figure, "studio" costumes, and bric-a-brac.

It is worth recalling that Ruskin possessed up to the last few years of his life Meissonier's "1807," one of the painter's larger works, though quite small in itself; and it is fair to assume that he, who had written

so much about painting and painters, saw in the work of this French artist many of the qualities he admired in painting, or the great critic would not have given the large price he did for this picture, nor lived with it for so many years. Of course this does not prove that "1807" is a great picture, but when we find those whose judgments we more or less accept admiring a particular work, it cannot but influence our own estimate of it.

Purchases are the finger-posts of taste, and any connoisseur can well understand Ruskin's admiration for Meissonier. There is none of that false sentiment or fustian drama about this French painter, no attempt at being grand. His mission is faithfully to record a scene, to give the theme in paint in such a way that the emotion awakened in the painter by a contemplation of the subject should be conjured up by others; and if, as is alleged by some critics, Meissonier goes no further than painting everything as though it were a group of still life, it may be retorted surely that this is better than investing work with a wholly false dramatic movement or sentimentality.

Such criticism as that does Meissonier great injustice, for he was perfectly sincere, deadly in earnest, and made every effort to give the world of his best, a rare enough occurrence. He showed, too, the utmost capacity for taking pains, which we do not find a too common trait with artists whatever be their genre.

No criticism can be just that ignores the point of view of the worker whose productions are in question. Criticism, to be worth anything, must be objective as well as subjective, constructive as well as destructive, and in studios some men are always welcomed because they first of all try to put themselves in the place of the artist, and acknowledge what there is to praise before they proceed to discuss, or blame, or make suggestions.

Few men have taken so much trouble to insure accuracy and artistic vraisemblance, and large as was the income the painter for many years made, he needed to receive long prices to pay him for the outlay he incurred in carrying a tiny canvas through to completion.

It is interesting to note that one of the first pictures he ever painted is "Dutch Burghers," and Meissonier shows marked sympathy for the Dutch painters of the seventeenth century—Terborch, Metsu, Teniers, G. Dow—who all preferred to manipulate a small work rather than to spread the same amount of effort over a larger surface. These "little masters" had the advantage of having a more picturesque costume to deal with in the dress of the day, and consequently they painted the life around them, whereas Meissonier in many of his pictures goes back to illustrate an earlier period. In spite, however, of certain critics, the clothing is not the picture, but only a picturesque accessory.

THE PRINT COLLECTOR

By Meissonier

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His Napoleonic pictures, such as "1807," will be enormously interesting historical documents in the near future, for if they fail to depict war as it is, they do display its trappings. And as to the question of war in its actuality, who is to decide the issue?

We have had in our late war in South Africa a good many renderings of what actually occurred, including photographic snap-shots, but so far as touching the imagination so that each one can fit out the scene for himself—and this is the highest mission of the painter—photography, with all its fidelity to the things seen, is singularly barren of results. War in Napoleon's time was much more of a pageant than it ever will be again in these days of long-range rifles, quick-firing guns, and open or skirmishing formations, and lent itself to Meissonier's treatment, while the painter had the advantage of having seen actual warfare.

Meissonier's childhood was gloomy, his youth hard and cramped, as one expects to find where adverse circumstances have to be battled with. Born at Lyons in 1815, a memorable year which seems to have had marked influence upon him, he came to Paris when three years old. His father was a colonial broker who lost his capital in the Revolution of 1830, and who, bent on restoring his fortunes, turned a deaf ear to the entreaties of his boy, who as a child had shown marked ability as a draughtsman, and longed to follow

art. He apprenticed Ernest to a druggist in Paris. This was in 1832, and his biographer states that he could never look at Gavarni's caricature, "Born to be a man, doomed to be a grocer," without a quip at his own expense.

While in this uncongenial environment the youth took to drawing in his leisure time, and at length besought his father to give him 100 francs, promising that he would not trouble him again. Meissonier *père* seems to have been moved by his earnestness, and having had an opinion on his son's ability from an artist to whom the youth had shown a drawing of a group of soldiers drinking in a wine-shop, which he had made in his scant leisure, he was allowed to give up shopkeeping and become a student. His father allowed him fifty centimes a day (about 4½d.), and invited him to the family dinner every Wednesday, but such was the boy's pride that when his father asked if he had dined the youth replied, "Yes; I have only come to have coffee with you."

Dumas said that, "like Châteaubriand during his exile in London, Meissonier dined on a halfpenny roll."

He exhibited for the first time in the Salon in 1834, and his father, being gradually brought to see that his son was of no ordinary ability, offered to send him to Rome and make him an allowance of 100 francs a month—prodigality of riches to the ambitious youth. He started for the Eternal City, but

owing to cholera got no farther than Lyons, where he passed the winter, suffering many privations from cold and hunger.

On his return to Paris his father provided him with a small studio, but reduced his allowance to 700 francs a year, telling him that he must make up the rest himself. Meissonier's first work was drawing on the wood for engravers, and so successful was he that between June '36 and April '39 he had made 9404 francs, and as this amounted to a clear nine to ten francs a day, he married the sister of a friend when he was twenty-three.

The work of illustrating to which he devoted the next few years, evidently gave him that precision and love of a small surface to decorate which distinguishes the work of his brush. How far superior his drawings on wood were to those of other illustrators can be seen by comparing Meissonier with the Johannots. Du Maurier very probably took his style of illustrating from the little Frenchman.

Meissonier said he "found himself" through a criticism passed upon a canvas he was working on—"Christ with His Apostles." He had invited a friend to see his pictures, for he abandoned black and white as soon as possible for colour, and the critic, after looking at the canvas for a while, walked round the studio. At length he stopped to look at a picture of a violoncello player, then returning to the canvas asked the

painter if he thought he could do such a subject better than Raphael, and on Meissonier replying "Certainly not," the visitor said, "Well, then, what's the use of saying over again what some one else has said far better? Here," he said, turning to the violoncello player, "you have something really personal, and most excellent."

"Every genius is the son of some other genius, but the artist may be the son of a father dead long before his birth," said Gautier.

Meissonier was a captain in the National Guard during the days of June '48, and he saw the insurrection surging around the Hôtel-de-Ville, and the barricade taken when its defenders were shot down and thrown out of windows. This scene of carnage lived in his memory, and in 1850 he exhibited one of the sternest pieces of realism ever painted, "The Barricade."

At the invitation of Napoleon III. he set out for the seat of war in '59, and was present at the battle of Solferino, to which he owed his conception of the great Napoleonic epopee.

Again he saw war in 1870, taking an active part as colonel of artillery. He was one of the last to leave Metz, as he thought he could be of more use in Paris than as another mouth to feed in that beleaguered fortress, and he was active in the defence of the capital.

"These experiences of the horrors of war explain," says his biographer, "not only 'Solferino,' but Meissonier's

A CAVALIER

By Meissonier

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fashion of rendering a battle generally. Wholesale slaughter was repugnant both to his art and his humanity; he could not have painted the massacre of Eylau. He seeks the expression of war in the mind that directs, in the courage that ennobles it. He exalts and humanises the idea of battle."

Few men have taken more pains in getting up a picture than Meissonier. He visited the old markets, curiosity shops, and other places in search of old armour and military equipment, and like Michael Angelo prided himself on making his own implements, being in turn tailor, saddler, joiner, cabinet-maker. "Let well alone is the dogma of the sluggard," he said.

The painter once came forward as a candidate for the Chamber of Deputies, and was also Mayor of his commune.

"There have been beautiful things in my life—glory, love; but nothing equals the passion for work," explains his personal attitude towards his art. No trouble was too great, no research too abstruse, where truth was to be attained, no labour too arduous to reach the standard he had set himself.

"The nearer I get to the end of my life of labour the more easily do I detach myself from all things which do not make truth and right their first object; and if I long to leave a painter's fame behind me, I desire even more to leave the name of a man."

One may judge that his was a sane and well-balanced

nature. His view of the business side of art is summed up in his remark: "It is a commonplace that artists are incapable of business. If people would only consider how much logic and science goes to the making of a good picture!"

Meissonier made a princely income, but he was prodigal in expenditure where his art was concerned, sparing no expense in costumes and models. He had the satisfaction of seeing his works advance in value in a remarkable way. The "Cuirassiers" was first bought for 250,000 francs, then sold in Brussels for 275,000. Then the owner was offered a profit of 100,000, and finally it was bought for 400,000 francs.

Meissonier was able to work up till the last. "Jena," his last completed picture, was finished in 1891, the year of his death. He was twice married, and was an advocate of early marriages, in this respect a striking contrast to Reynolds, who seems to have thought that a painter married is a painter marred.

CHAPTER IX

SIR THOMAS LAWRENCE, P.R.A.

CHAPTER IX

SIR THOMAS LAWRENCE, P.R.A.

LAWRENCE is the last painter of eminence of the nineteenth century whose method of work was inspired by the men who gave such lustre to the eighteenth. Born in 1769 and dying in 1830, he forms a link between the school of Reynolds and that of Millais, who was but a year old at Sir Thomas's death. Though half Lawrence's life belongs to the last century, none of the newer impulses which were later on entirely to change the current of the art of the day are to be seen in his work. The style to which his name has been given was fixed almost from the beginning of his career, and its meretriciousness, to use an epithet often heard in reference to Lawrence, arose from the persistent misuse of a fine gift, the too great satisfaction at its possession.

Unlike Reynolds, who all his life was searching for the more excellent way—that veritable philosopher's stone of all artists—striving that each canvas that he started should be better than the last, an ambition that led him unfortunately to try numberless experiments

with pigments and mediums that were unstable, Lawrence went on repeating the trick which he had acquired, apparently with so little effort, until the inherent weaknesses of his method well-nigh killed his genius.

Some may object to the use of this word in connection with Lawrence, and if the faculty for taking pains is the accepted definition, then the word is wrongly applied; but if, on the other hand, it may be defined as that gift which enables its possessor to do what is beyond the reach of others, talent being the lesser gift that enables its possessor to accomplish with ease what others do with difficulty, then Lawrence must be pronounced a genius.

His career, looked at from this distance, is little short of extraordinary, and akin to that impossible standard set up by certain lady novelists, whose painters, when they figure in their books, are so supremely gifted, such magicians of the brush, that they are able to produce masterpieces while ordinary mortals are stretching the canvas and setting their palettes.

Lawrence came to London in 1786, and was kindly received by Reynolds, who evidently saw the precocious talent of this youth of seventeen, who in writing home to his mother at the time said: "Excepting Sir Joshua, for the painting of a head I would risk my reputation with any painter in London." The President gave the

young man the entrée of his studio, and was for admitting him an associate when he was only twenty-one—which is three years under the age required by the statutes—but Wheatley was chosen instead.

This choice, instead of being a disadvantage, was one of the many instances of the extraordinary luck that attended Lawrence, for the year following (1791) he was elected a supplemental associate, an irregular honour which no man since has enjoyed, and an invaluable aid to a young provincial starting in London.

The popularity of Sir Joshua begot endless imitators, yet the President's very gifts were a fatal lure to those who had no great natural heat which they could fan into a flame, and could only hope to warm their talent at another's altar. Northcote, who was Reynolds' chief pupil, realised at the end of his apprenticeship of five years what a bad teacher the President was, and no one was more sensible than Sir Joshua both of his own shortcomings, which his taste and experience generally succeeded in hiding, and of the disadvantage of imitating his methods, and thereby exaggerating their defects. Northcote records a curt comment on the work a young painter brought for his inspection, in which Reynolds' trick of using red in reflected lights had been followed. "I had made it bad enough, and you have made it worse."

"Peter Pindar," whose lyrical criticisms on the painters of the time are wonderfully just from our

point of view, deals with the Reynolds' cult in the verse :—

> "Sir Joshua's happy pencil hath produced
> A host of copyists much of the same feature,
> By which the wit hath greatly been abused;
> I own Sir Joshua great, but Nature greater."

Lawrence, who had only begun to paint in oils in 1786, modelled himself on Reynolds, whose power of seizing character, richness of colouring, and simplicity of handling, acted for a time as a useful check on the young man's besetting sin of affectation, flattery, and thinness of handling; so that while his master painted some of his finest work in his last decade, Lawrence never improved after he was thirty, for, as Peter Pindar hints, Lawrence lost sight of the fact that Nature is *the* teacher, and what all artists have to beware of is the mistake of allowing trick to take the place of sterling work, and convention to supersede reality. Lawrence built on another man's foundation and never looked to the underpinning, so that the structure that he reared became too unstable.

If the influence of Reynolds was not altogether for good on the young men of his day, that of Lawrence was far more pernicious later on; for his extraordinary success disposed students to tread in his footsteps when he was President.

Probably painting had never fallen into a more conventional, stilted, unreal condition than it did

during the first half of the nineteenth century. If Lawrence had "made it bad enough," to use Reynolds' words, his copyists, lacking his wonderful facility and superficial knowledge, sank to an abyss of mediocrity from which nothing short of a return to the fountain-head had power to rescue them.

Bearing this in mind we can better understand the attitude that Ruskin took towards modern art, and the value of his defence of that society of young men who, thrusting aside all well-worn tradition, went direct to Nature for inspiration, and to painters before Raphael for style, and who were therefore called pre-Raphaelites.

We see in the painting of Lawrence conventions carried to their utmost limit; Nature attenuated—like a Pasteur virus—each time it passed through a fresh follower of tradition, until sterility was reached. No wonder is it that the rising painters of the 'fifties should attempt to see Nature for themselves, instead of academically, for the history of Academies seems to resolve itself into the perpetuation of dogmas deduced from the work of some dominating leader.

So long as the President from 1820 kept to portraiture, his shortcomings were held in check by his ability, but the falseness of his style and the misdirection of his ideas meet in such a work as "Satan calling his Legions," painted in 1797, and now in the Diploma Gallery, where it can be seen.

The conventions that finally strangled art in this

country were by no means confined to England, for France has suffered grievously from adherence to precedent, and to this day is still more hidebound than ourselves. If we study the work of men like Vernet and Delaroche, we find much that can be said of Lawrence applicable to them.

Lawrence seems to be a striking example of that fatal facility which has made so many men come short of the promise of their youth. It is seen among schoolboys: those who by their natural powers could do many things are made indolent by their very abilities, and because they can do a thing well, with small effort, never put out their full strength, and often end by losing what they started with.

It is of course easy for us to sum up the case against early Victorian art, and to put our finger on the causes that brought about so lifeless a result, just as it is easy to see the "meretriciousness" of Lawrence, and to marvel how he could so impose himself upon the art of his time; but the matter will be better understood if we glance at the career of a man whose life had so much of romance in it, and this will certainly assist us to appreciate his work.

One is inclined to discount much that has been written about Lawrence, as the exaggeration of those who were dazzled by his personality and gifts. Making due allowances for over-statements, it is clear that the painter was as precocious in art as Mozart was in music,

PORTRAIT OF LADY BLESSINGTON
BY SIR THOS. LAWRENCE

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for at the age of twelve we find him settled in Bath. "His atelier was the resort of all the distinguished company of this splendid centre of wealth and dignity. His rooms were frequented by fashionable loungers, by foreign virtuosi, and by the real and pretended judges and patrons of Art. He as yet painted only in the prevalent taste of that day—crayons." So writes his biographer.

He was in the habit of finishing three or four of these paintings every week, and as he received three guineas for his half-lengths, a large sum for Bath in those days, he made a sufficient income to keep his parents and sisters. His practice was to give to each sitter half-an-hour, and then to paint from memory for as much longer immediately after the sitter had left him. He thus early acquired that rapidity of execution which enabled him later on to paint some of his best heads, like that of Curran, in one sitting, and in this case in one hour.

A drawing he made of Mrs. Siddons as Aspasia, a part which he saw her act in at Bath, was engraved at this time, and had an extensive sale. His own portrait had been painted by Hoare and engraved a little before this. Lawrence's solicitude for his family, a noble trait in his character, was the cause of the monetary embarrassments which burdened him when in the full tide of his prosperity, and continued to his death.

Lawrence *père* had tried many things, from the law, the stage, the excise, to innkeeping, but in none was he successful, and finding in his boy remarkable aptitude for both drawing and reciting, he seems to have done what he could to foster these gifts, and was in the habit of showing the child off before his customers.

When he moved from Bristol, where the boy was born, to Devizes, visitors to and from Bath, who rested at the Black Bull, took notice of the curly-headed child, whose father would inquire of them, "Will you have him recite from the poets or take your portraits?" There is a record that at six years old he drew the portrait of Mrs. Kenyon.

Of schooling he seems to have had less than two years, and this before he was eight, so that we can only say that Nature was his chief teacher; though perhaps we attach too much importance to the knowledge gained from pedagogues and books, and not enough to experience, observation, and contact with people of distinction and influence. Certain it is that Lawrence never appears to have suffered from this quite exceptional upbringing, for no man could have been more courted or more fitted to hold his own in society than the third President of the Royal Academy.

As to his art training, we can only point to a short course in the Royal Academy schools, which he entered when he came to London in 1787; but the trustee

Howard records that "his proficiency in drawing, even at that time, was such as to leave all his competitors in the antique school far behind him. His personal attractions were as remarkable as his talent, and he seemed to the admiring students as nothing less than a young Raphael suddenly dropt among them."

He had painted his first picture in oil the year before, and it was a head of himself in that medium which he submitted to Reynolds, who said, "It is clear you have been looking at old masters; but my advice to you is to study Nature." As a child he had been taken to see the old masters at Corsham Court, and on being missed was found gazing with riveted attention at a picture by Rubens, when he is said to have exclaimed, "Ah! I shall never be able to paint like that." This may very probably be true, for it is pretty obvious that Lawrence's style of handling was modelled upon that of the Flemish painter.

Lawrence when he came to town was able to take a suite of rooms in Leicester Square at four guineas a week, so that it is evident the reputation he had won at Bath followed him to London. His parents had also come up to town, their son making them a good allowance, and old Lawrence made one more venture in money-making, this time investing a legacy of £200 left to his daughter Anne in the purchase of "a little museum then exhibiting in the Strand, and consisting of natural curiosities, stuffed birds, &c., &c., and

to these he added his son's paintings, such as his 'Christ bearing the Cross.'" Notwithstanding the handicap such a father appears to have been, Lawrence dearly loved him, and was profoundly moved at his death in 1797.

George III. was so pleased with the young painter that he endeavoured to procure his election as associate when twenty-one, and the patronage that he received continued to increase, his only rivals being Opie and Hoppner. After the death of the latter in 1810, Lawrence for the next twenty years had the field of fashionable portrait-painting to himself. In 1817 he was sent by the Prince Regent to Aix-la-Chapelle to paint the allied sovereigns, to complete the series of portraits which now hang in the Waterloo gallery at Windsor. Afterwards he went to Vienna, and thence to Rome, painting portraits of crowned heads, including Pius VII. and other notables. On his return in 1820, on the death of West, he was elected President of the Royal Academy.

Lawrence never married, and his coquetting with the two daughters of Mrs. Siddons (the portrait of one is in Hertford House) seems to have led to the death of one, if not of both. A candid biographer styles him a flirt, and a lady who knew him well has left this estimate of him: "It cannot be too strongly stated that his manners were likely to mislead without his intending it. He could not write a common answer

to a dinner invitation without its assuming the tone of a billet-doux; the very commonest conversation was held in that soft, low whisper, and with that tone of deference and interest, which are so unusual, and so calculated to please. I am myself persuaded that he never intentionally gave pain. He was not a male coquette; he had no plan of conquest."

This was written after the death of the second of Mrs. Siddon's daughters, and his biographer says he ever after used black sealing-wax! He subsequently fell in love with the daughter of a peer, but as the father considered it *infra dig.* for the girl to marry a painter, Lawrence had to nurse his affection in secret.

Though not tall, being under five feet nine, his handsome face, active figure (he had been fond of athletics and pugilism as a youth), agreeable manners, and fine voice, which showed to advantage in his recitations, were not thrown away upon society, and George IV., who, we must allow, was a judge, pronounced him a high-bred gentleman.

From this vignette of one of the most successful painters who ever wielded a brush, we can pass to his portrait of Lady Blessington, which is a typical example of his methods. She was about eighteen then, and was one of the beauties of the day, having only recently come from Ireland, where she was born in 1789. Lawrence represents her in the first flush of maidenhood, though she had been forced to marry

when fourteen an officer who appears to have treated her brutally.

There is great animation in the picture, and the pose is both easy and pleasing. The painting is thin like Gainsborough's, but it lacks his reaching-out quality and his natural simplicity. In explanation of the word meretricious which has been used, one may say that Lawrence's method was showy, and his handling lacks refinement and solidity; for suavity and gentility do not constitute refinement in painting, or compensate for that wise selection which makes the best of what it takes, but knows what to reject.

He formed a habit of flattering his sitters, so that at a general glance, especially when one sees a number of engravings after him, there is an irksome uniformity; he lacks the variety which so distinguishes Reynolds. The "Book of Beauty" style is coupled with his name, but this was largely due to the prevailing fashion in the art of the day, the work of Lawrence's imitators, for Lady Blessington did not commence the issue of that work until 1834.

The mannerisms which became so accentuated during the last twenty years of his life made him open to the charge of seeing every woman through a sort of Lawrence medium, and instead of giving us their characteristics, the work as it left nature's hands, we have an edited edition with Lawrence as interpreter.

Lady Blessington's career is on a par with those of Perdita and Lady Hamilton, and ended, much as theirs did, in trouble. Left a widow at twenty-eight, her dissolute husband, Captain Farmer, having fallen out of a window in the King's Bench Prison during a drunken orgie, she married the first Earl of Blessington, a widower with two children, in 1818, and he fitted up a luxurious mansion in St. James's Square for his new bride.

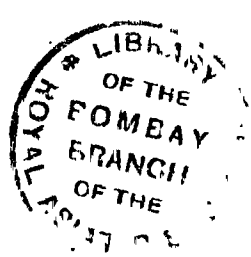
They afterwards travelled about Europe, meeting Byron at Genoa. Count D'Orsay was one of the party, and he married the earl's daughter in 1827; two years later the earl died. The widow had now only a jointure of £2000 a year, instead of the £30,000 a year income when she married the earl.

Lady Blessington started her salon again, first at Seamore Place and afterwards at Gore House, and thither the fashionable, literary, and artistic world flocked, and there D'Orsay, who had deserted his wife a few months after his marriage, seems to have been the lady's *cher ami*, though he with much discretion lived next door. For two years before the crash came he lived in imminent danger of arrest, and in 1849, when creditors could no longer be kept at bay, he, "the most splendid specimen of a man, and a well-dressed one," in London, fled to Paris with one portmanteau, followed shortly after by his partner in debt.

For sixteen years Lady Blessington had earned between £2000 and £3000 a year by her pen—Dickens when he started the *Daily News* appointed her correspondent for *special* information (presumably Society *on dits*) at a salary of £500 a year—but her expenditure always exceeded her income, and when her jointure finally dwindled to nothing through the Irish potato famine, she could no longer stave off ruin, which must have stared her in the face for years, and she too fled to Paris, but died within a few weeks of her flight. D'Orsay died three years later, aged fifty-one, so that he was twelve years younger than Lady Blessington.

CHAPTER X

FERDINAND HEILBUTH



CHAPTER X

FERDINAND HEILBUTH

TO the painting of contemporary life Ferdinand Heilbuth brought a full equipment, and the naïveté of his methods was eminently suited to such works as the "Excavations in Rome" and "The Cardinal," here reproduced. He painted a large number of pictures of Roman life, as he saw it around him during a residence of some years in the Eternal City, in many of which he introduced a cardinal in his scarlet robes, which gained him the sobriquet of "The Painter of Cardinals."

It is easy to understand why he chose ecclesiastics and their surroundings as the motifs of his pictures, for while they gave him better opportunity of obtaining pictorial incidents, he escaped, to a great extent, the difficulty that besets those who faithfully depict contemporary life, in having to deal with the inartistic style of dress of the day.

Many painters say that it is a great mistake to let the tailor and modiste give the date to pictures, and yet

if an artist elects to paint contemporary life, what can he do but paint people as they are?

Surely no one would wish to revive such a custom, introduced as a way out of this difficulty, as that of the seventeenth century, which led to Charles II. and James II. being habited as Roman senators; a custom, by the way, that had not died out until the eighteenth century was well advanced.

Such a convention was not only ridiculous, but also utterly false as an aid to art. It led to that absurd classicism which we have had occasion to refer to in speaking of Greuze and Fragonard. They adopted, as we said, a convention, and Fragonard painted a world in which a highly sophisticated existence tried to hide itself under a veneer of Arcadian ("Lowther Arcadian," as a modern wit said) simplicity.

It was as far removed from actuality maybe as the Neo-classic art of David and his contemporaries, but it had the merit of allowing some of the spirit of the time to creep through its convention, while that which succeeded it touched life at no point, and led to dulness of the most depressing kind.

That the real is better than the sham is a truth that soon comes home, for a faithful delineation of life as it appears soon acquires the value of a human document. Reynolds and his contemporaries took the fashion of the moment and made what they could of it; and if we consider the extraordinary coiffures of many of the

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THE CARDINAL

By Heilbuth

eighteenth-century masterpieces, we can but wonder how painters could bring themselves to paint them, and having done so, could make them look so well in a picture as they did.

Perhaps if we could have seen "Nelly O'Brien" or "Perdita" as soon as they left the painters' easels we should have found the same fault with them as we do with contemporary works in which the dress of the day is depicted.

It was remarked by many who saw the collected works of Millais at the Academy after his death how old-fashioned many of his portraits looked, and this after twenty-five years only. Perhaps by the time fifty years have elapsed this feeling will give place to one of interest and satisfaction.

The historian of contemporary manners may be as glad to see Heilbuth's picture, "Tourists looking at Roman Excavations," as we are to see Gainsborough's "The Mall in 1770." The painter who cannot be poetical or dramatic without being stilted or theatrical, had better, far better, paint life as it is, seeing what terrible results have followed from the opposite course of painting it as the painter thinks it ought to be.

Some of my readers may remember the pictures by Tissot of fashionable life that the painter used to exhibit some twenty years ago. I should say that he had studied Heilbuth. There is much in common between the work of the two men, for Heilbuth, though born at

Hamburgh in 1826, was essentially French in feeling. Refusing to fight against his adopted country in 1870, he came to London, and when peace was proclaimed became a naturalised Frenchman, dying in Paris in 1887.

Tissot, who was a Frenchman domiciled in London, suddenly gave up the style of work that had brought him into popularity, and went to Palestine to paint religious works in the same realistic fashion as that in which he had depicted young men and maidens of Bayswater and St. John's Wood; but the chances are that in the near future far greater store will be set on the art that made him popular as a young man, the art that reflected faithfully, and with a certain dainty charm, life as he saw it among the well-to-do, rather than such life as he imagined was lived in Palestine two thousand years ago.

Work like that of Heilbuth is not among the great achievements of the brush, but within its limitations it is good, and above all things it was sincere and without pretence. If he did not peer into the soul, he did justice to the body, and a simple statement is of far more value, as it is far more impressive, than any sham.

CHAPTER XI

RUBENS

CHAPTER XI

RUBENS[1]

RUBENS, Van Dyck, and Rembrandt left for those who came after them so many "hints of the proper craft, tricks of the tools' true play," that we can with advantage study the Fleming and the two Dutchmen together, and find much that is common to them all.

From the birth of Rubens, in 1577, to the death of Rembrandt, in 1669, the best of the work in Flanders and the Netherlands was produced, and when we look at the achievements of all three men we have to marvel, not only at the supreme excellence of their productions, but also at their extraordinary facility, which enabled them to get through such a prodigious amount of work.

For sheer power in covering large surfaces with paint, put on with a swiftness and mastery that is amazing, Rubens stands out as the most perfect brush-master the world has seen. At Hertford House he is represented

[1] The reproduction of Rubens' masterpiece, "The Rainbow Landscape," is confined to the edition de luxe.

by comparatively small pictures, but what he could do on a large surface can be judged at Grosvenor House, and better still at the Louvre; in one room of which is shown the series commemorating the marriage of Henry IV. and Marie de Medici.

Perhaps no works better display the power and personality of the man, for to the courtier, ambassador, and friend of kings and emperors, such a subject as the love affairs of those in the highest places in the land had a fascinating interest. To record these was a task as congenial as it was suited to the display of the painter's exuberant vitality, skill in the manipulation of paint, and inexhaustible fancy in throwing together and building up a design with quite a Napoleonic mastery.

The enormous amount of work that came from his hands could only be produced by the employment of a large staff of assistants, but then Rubens' genius attracted the best talent of the day to his magnificent atelier at Antwerp. Among his assistants were Snyders and Van Dyck.

Rubens painted a good many pot-boilers, but when the patrons for them are kings and princes, even a pot-boiler takes on an importance, "a grand manner," that finally justifies its inclusion among masterpieces. It must be conceded that Rubens maintains an extraordinarily high level, as though it were less easy to paint below his standard than it is for most men to come up to theirs, and with the world at his feet he might well

make the requisite effort to dazzle and astonish those who dominated it.

Whatever may be urged against Rubens as a painter, the populace is always ready to give unstinted applause to the man who is supreme in his line, whether he be a quick-change artiste, a juggler, or a lightning delineator. Rapid to a marvel Rubens was: for while most artists were planning out a composition, and preparing themselves to commence, the Fleming had dashed in a group of figures, life-size, with a sense of dignity and opulence that makes such a strong appeal to us.

Pageantry finds its fullest expression in state functions, and the man who can make such scenes live on canvas will command the applause of the multitude. Such work, too, demands very exceptional gifts. The brush must be held by a hand that is strong, flexible, and sure: and the brain to direct it must have a vivid, rapid vision, an eye for big masses and striking lines, great physical endurance, and popular sympathies. It will be directed less to delicate nuances, more to broad effects; and the loving care and lingering fondness which compels the artist to return again and again to his canvas, because he sees further still in the mind's eye than is suggested by his work, will be absent, or at any rate lost sight of, beneath the insolence of mastery, which carries all before it.

"The Rainbow Landscape" is one of the few works of this kind that Rubens painted, and it is most inter-

esting to see how he treated a subject where the human element is subordinate to the natural. It is nature seen in panorama, as the lord of many acres might be thought to survey his demesne, though the chances are that such an observer would lack Rubens' dramatic sense, which enabled him to give us a tragi-comedy of country life, for "The Rainbow Landscape" may be termed a picture in so many acts; a drama that appeals to the broad sympathy of human nature.

Consider the number of motifs introduced—enough for half-a-dozen pictures. In the middle distance we have men stacking corn, taking the sheaves from a waggon, and building them into a rick. Then there is the wheat ready for the sickle, and coming along the road are three peasants, a man who walks between two buxom lasses, to one of whom he is evidently trying to show off to advantage. The other woman is directing her attention to the driver of the waggon, which is the object in the immediate foreground. In the centre of the picture a man is driving a herd of cows, one of which is halting to drink at a pond, and on the extreme right of the canvas we have a number of ducks, all very animated, and characteristically touched in.

As for the landscape itself, it is worth while to note the extreme care with which the distance is painted. There is no generalising, but trees and other objects are mapped in, one feels, with extreme fidelity. The dark group of trees to the right of the picture is

lit up here and there, while a rainbow arches the whole. Did the painter intend this as a symbol of hope, or is it merely an effective item in a moving pageant—a pageant, we can say, of man, "who goeth forth to his labour until the evening," who tills the field, then lies beneath? Rubens suggests the opulence and sensuous joy of life, but there is no hint of death. A man so full of exuberant vitality, whose career was one long triumphant progress, was not likely to give way to morbid conceits. To drain life to the lees; like Ulysses, to "drink delight of battle with his peers," was more in keeping with the character of Rubens, who led too busy a life to indulge in the sentiment of pessimism. To work as he did needed great physical strength and nervous energy, and this landscape seems to me to be Rubens' Psalm of Life, a pastoral symphony in paint.

As a picture it grows upon one. The painter sees life in its plenitude. There is nothing petty or one-sided in his outlook, nothing small in his treatment of his subject. It is nature seen from the secure coign of success; it is not a "bit" from nature, an illustration for a handbook, but an outspoken pæan of praise—full of a healthy zest for life. Death for the while is kept at bay, and seems to find no foothold in this well-tilled Eden.

Those who see this picture for the first time may be somewhat disappointed on a cursory view. In colouring

it is less attractive than the work of the moderns, but Rubens' landscape must not be put into competition with the works of the moment; it must be judged as a grand composition in which the painter has grappled successfully with some of the greatest difficulties that beset an artist, the binding together of a number of incidents into a harmonious whole, in which there is a scheme of chiaroscuro that gives variety and relief, balance to secure repose, and rhythm of line which insures unity of effect.

Few painters have started better equipped than Rubens for a great career. His father was a man of learning, though but a druggist, and as legal adviser to the second wife of William the Silent he appears to have become her lover. The result was that the boy had a very varied training, which materially helped him to play diverse parts afterwards as courtier, ambassador, and Court painter, where his knowledge of Latin, French, Italian, German, English, and Dutch stood him in good stead.

Born in 1577 at Siegen in Westphalia, on June 29, he was apprenticed at the age of fifteen to a painter of repute at Antwerp. At the age of twenty-one he was admitted a member of the painters' guild, and in 1600 he went to Italy and entered the service of the Duke of Mantua, with whom he remained for about eight years. The duke sent Rubens on a mission to Philip IV. of Spain. On his return to Antwerp he was

appointed Court painter to the Regent of the Netherlands, and the same year he married his first wife, Isabella Brant, whose portrait is in the Wallace Collection. The important work in Antwerp Cathedral, "The Descent from the Cross," was begun in 1611. Rubens was paid 2400 florins for this masterpiece.

In 1620 he visited Paris, and there received from Marie de Medici the commission for the series of large pictures now in the Louvre, portraying incidents in the lives of herself and Henry IV. These works were all completed in five years, an extraordinary instance of rapidity of production. The forty ceiling paintings which he designed, and which were carried out under his supervision in two years, are other instances of his power of work, for though Rubens employed a staff of clever assistants, his own share of the work was very considerable, because he worked over all that his assistants did in addition to supplying the designs.

In 1628 he again was sent on a diplomatic mission to Philip IV., and so impressed was the Spanish king with his subject's ability that he commissioned Rubens to go to London to convey his views to Charles I., who knighted him in 1630.

The same year he married again. His second wife was the beautiful Héléne Fourment, by whom he had four sons and three daughters, but the male line became extinct in 1746.

The painter built a magnificent house and studio

at Antwerp, where, surrounded by his assistants and the pupils who were attracted by the commanding position he occupied as the greatest painter of the day, he worked up to the last, dying in the fulness of his powers in 1640. In his working life of some forty years he had produced an amount of work that must make all those who come after him marvel at his extraordinary command over the resources of his art.

CHAPTER XII

VAN DYCK

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VAN DYCK

IF Rubens crowded so much into his sixty-three years, what are we to say of Van Dyck, who covered such a prodigious area of canvas, and much of it too in a way that has never been surpassed, in the short space of forty-two years? Rubens had begun his wonderful career by entering the service of the Duke of Mantua in 1600, when Van Dyck was a year old, and sixteen years later this youth became one of the assistants of his great countryman, in whose studio he remained for four years, and whose tricks of brushing and designing he so quickly acquired. Many works hitherto credited to Rubens, such as the "St. Martin dividing his Cloak with the Beggar," at Windsor, are now recognised as from the brush of his great pupil.

To see Van Dyck in the full panoply of his genius the churches of Flanders must be visited, for in them hang the large canvases he painted on his return to Antwerp after his *wanderjahre* in Italy; but at Hertford House his genius as a portrait-painter can be

seen to the greatest advantage, and it is in that genre that the gifted Fleming, who spent the last nine years of his crowded life in England, is best known. We have ample opportunity of studying this phase of his art, and of seeing how he limned the sitters who crowded his studio at Westminster, those handsome cavaliers and graceful dames who adorned the court of the connoisseur King Charles I.

Like Rubens, Van Dyck was a courtier by nature, and though he lived less in the public gaze than did his master, he certainly was *intime* with Charles I., for was not his marriage with Mary Ruthven negotiated by the Stuart, to save him, it would seem, from falling a prey to the wiles of some adventuress? How Van Dyck contrived to find leisure for intrigues and liaisons is difficult to understand, but working hard and playing hard appears to stimulate some natures, forcing them to exert themselves to the utmost.

It seems as though the very finest work can only be done at white heat. If we go on hammering when metal is cold we may finish the surface with an even quality, but we efface those first impresses of the tool which give such character to any handiwork. No good painting tells of laziness, which is destructive to all art. It is when paint is brushed on nervously, and is put on with meaning, that every touch takes value; and this frank decision gives to the whole design a moving quality that palpitates with life and animation.

Van Dyck learned in a good school, and appreciated the *premier coup*, to use a modern French art term, which one may translate, "Work complete from the start." If work is wrong at the outset, then scrape it out or take up a new canvas: never botch or boggle, or try to pull it round; begin anew, using the knowledge gained by failure. This is the only way to secure freshness of colour and vitality of handling.

One has only to study the portrait here reproduced, which is thought to be the wife of the painter Cornelis de Vos, examples of whose portraiture hang near, or the grand "Phillipe le Roy," to realise that such fine pictures could only be produced by working in such a spirit as has been suggested. Putting aside the mechanical dexterity displayed — that hand-cunning which enables ideas to find such adequate expression; the power to do wedded to the power to think and plan—the way Van Dyck looked at his sitters, the taste he shows in posing them, the grace, distinction, even elegance he imparts are mental qualities such as bespeak the courtier and refined gentleman. His sitters certainly look thoroughbred, and no king could have been limned to throw into relief the exclusiveness of kingship better than the Charles of Van Dyck.

If Van Dyck paints his own portrait he is "The Shepherd Paris"; he must invest every one with distinction, and whether it was that most of his sitters were distinguished and therefore only needed faith-

fully recording, or whether it was the vision of the man, the way he had of looking at men and women, he unquestionably contrives to give them all a grand air, a secret that was passed on to the eighteenth-century painters in Great Britain, for we know that Gainsborough admired Van Dyck above all other portrait-painters.

Sir Anthony was fond of deep rich colours, and the way he handles black in a portrait is nearly as fine as the method of Velasquez, who was born the same year as the Flemish master, but lived till 1660. Out of this mysteriously rich general tone of the canvas the figure emerges, and the flesh by contrast is made the most prominent and interesting feature in the scheme. Van Dyck knew how to focus his interest, and secured oneness of effect by subordinating all else to the flesh, and yet in the treatment of draperies and accessories he shows rare judgment and skill of arrangement and treatment.

It has been remarked that the Fleming's work is at times conventional, and that in such features as the hands he does not attempt to secure individuality or character. It must be remembered that what we call realism and naturalism is the "note" of the present day, and has been largely brought about by photography, which gives faithful records of things, but none of ideas. Van Dyck aimed at giving a pleasing presentment of his sitters, and possibly they demanded it, being accessible to such flattery.

1

PORTRAIT OF A FLEMISH LADY

By Van Dyck

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To him each canvas was a picture, and before all else he was going to exhibit his taste in composing and arranging his models, his eye for beauty, his sense of proportion, and his mastery over his materials; and where the convention is consistent so that every part is in harmony, the picture is right, the brain through the eye being satisfied.

But it is unjust to accuse Van Dyck of being conventional in any narrow, superficial way. He studied in various schools, and learnt of every one whose work appealed to him, and he went so far as to work in the spirit and manner of the masters of the north of Europe, and later on of Italy. That his training was thorough and severe his work attests, while the etchings on copper he did are among some of the finest ever wrought *en eau forte;* evidence sufficient, one must allow, to proclaim him an exceptionally gifted delineator.

This is a contemporary account of the painter's method, taken from Dé Piles' *Cours de Peinture:*— "Having made appointments with his sitters, he never worked more than an hour on each portrait, whether sketching or finishing it. When the clock announced that the hour had passed, he rose from his seat, and made a reverence to the person sitting to inform him that enough had been done for that day, and agreed with him to come another day at a certain hour. After this the painter's *valet-de-chambre* cleaned his brushes, and brought him another palette, so that he might be

ready for another sitter, who would arrive at an appointed time.

"He worked in this manner upon many portraits in one day, and he painted with extreme rapidity. Having made a slight sketch for a portrait, he placed his sitter in the attitude he had previously arranged, and upon grey paper with black and white chalks he in a quarter of an hour drew the figure and costume, designing them in a grand style and with exquisite taste. This study he then gave to his able assistants, who copied it on a large scale, and, aided by the dresses of the sitter, which were at the master's request sent to them for the purpose, worked out the draperies to the best of their abilities. Van Dyck went dexterously over the painting of his assistants, and very quickly produced, by his great skill, the art and the truth which we all admire. For the hands, he employed many persons who sat to him as models for that purpose."

Sir Peter Lely has recorded that a Mr. Lanière who was painted by Van Dyck (the picture is now in possession of the Duke of Westminster) told him that "he satt seaven entire dayes for it to Sir Anto, and that he painted upon it all these seven days, both morning and afternoon, and only intermitted the time they were at dinner, and he said likewise that though Mr. Lanière satt so often and so long for his picture, that he was not permitted so much as once to see it, till he had perfectly finished the face to his own satisfaction." It was the

portrait of the King's master of music that induced Charles to send for Van Dyck, who came to England in 1632.

The painter's parents both belonged to good burgher families of Antwerp, where Van Dyck was born in 1599. At the early age of ten he was a pupil of Van Balen, an artist of repute at the time, and five years later he entered the atelier of Rubens, under whose immediate direction he worked, assisting Sir Peter Paul in the decorating of the great Church of the Jesuits at Antwerp.

In 1618 he was admitted a *franc-maître* of the Painters' Guild, and two years later we find an agent of the Earl of Arundel writing to that nobleman, who had invited the young man to visit England: "Van Dyck lives with Rubens, and his works are beginning to be scarcely less esteemed than those of his master. He is a young man of one and twenty; his parents are persons of considerable property in this city; and it will be difficult, therefore, to induce him to remove, especially as he must perceive the rapid fortune which Rubens is amassing."

He is thought to have made his first visit to England in 1621, but the same year, at the suggestion of Rubens, Van Dyck started for Italy, and after staying in Venice he proceeded to Genoa, where he remained awhile, painting several portraits. After a lengthy stay in the chief cities of Italy, Van Dyck was back in Antwerp in

1626. This was a period of great activity, as besides painting about thirty important religious works for the churches of Flanders, he found time to execute some of his finest portraits. Several of these were of the commanders in the field at the beginning of the Thirty Years' War, and he must have visited the opposing camps, as he limned the generals on both sides.

In March or April 1632 Van Dyck arrived in England, and was at once appointed Painter to the King, with apartments at Eltham Palace and a studio at Blackfriars; he was also knighted, and a pension of £200 a year was settled upon him. Charles seems to have been as much interested in his protégé as was Philip with Velasquez, for he constantly visited the painter to gossip with him and to watch him at work.

Van Dyck's reputation was affected at this time by liaisons with various ladies attached to the Court, and one of these, Margaret Lemon, bore him a daughter, whom he provided for at his death. He married at the King's suggestion Mary Ruthven, a girl of great beauty in the Queen's household, by whom he had a daughter who lived until 1703.

The painter, notwithstanding the King's offer of one hundred pounds to whoever should save Van Dyck's life, died eight days after the birth of his only legitimate child, and was buried in old St. Paul's on December 11, 1641.

CHAPTER XIII

REMBRANDT

CHAPTER XIII

REMBRANDT

REMBRANDT was born seven years after Van Dyck, and he lived for twenty-nine years after Charles's painter died, so that both were working simultaneously when their powers were at their height. What influence either of these men exerted on the other we have no means of knowing, except by a comparative study of their works. As Rubens' atelier at Antwerp drew artists from far and near, it is more than probable that the Dutchman would have visited the Fleming, whose career did not close until Rembrandt was thirty-four.

We have a man of a very distinct temperament and vision in this genius of the Netherlands, as a comparison of the works that have come down to us with that of his two contemporaries evidences. He was no courtier, no elegant man of the world or fine gentleman, to speak neatly-balanced, honied periods to lull us into the belief that this is the best of all possible worlds.

The world went very well with Rubens and his

pupil all their days, and it would have been an affectation for either of them to have nursed despair or pessimism. They presented life as it appeared to them, as it was conditioned by their surroundings.

Rembrandt too had his period of prosperity, but the dark lean years of adversity swallowed up the earlier fat ones. He was a man much less influenced by environment than they, or at any rate the mind within was independent of the world without, and whatever happened in the way of good or evil fortune, his outlook on life was penetrating, human, accurate.

The surface of things might please, and was certainly worth recording, but there was the world within to make manifest, and we find therefore in Rembrandt's portraits qualities wanting in the suave, polished art of Rubens and Van Dyck. Elegance gives way to vigour, and refinement is replaced by force and penetration. Individuality, character, what we call realism is seen in the great Dutchman's work, and we must be prepared to accept the exchange if we are to understand and enjoy him.

The human quality just mentioned has its special import, for it makes search into the souls of his sitters; it develops character and gives to each his personality. The painter whose sitters are kings and princes is called upon to make much of the glitter and panoply of life. The humanity below is somewhat obscured beneath the outward trappings of state.

While Rubens and Van Dyck were painting the aristocracy of millinery, Rembrandt was limning the aristocracy of intellect, or at all events he was endowing many of his sitters with distinction by his art, while the other two painters had distinguished people as models, and had only to realise them to obtain a result more or less striking.

Let not the reader imagine that Rubens and Van Dyck were incapable of doing justice to a sitter unless he happened to be distinguished. It will be admitted, after a comparative study of the work of these three men, that the two Flemish painters were so pleased with the clothed man that they rarely treated him naked, as he is by nature. This Rembrandt, who went for character, did, leaving his great contemporaries to aim at elegance. Rembrandt painted himself many times, but they all would seem to be faithful records; Van Dyck paints himself as "The Shepherd Paris."

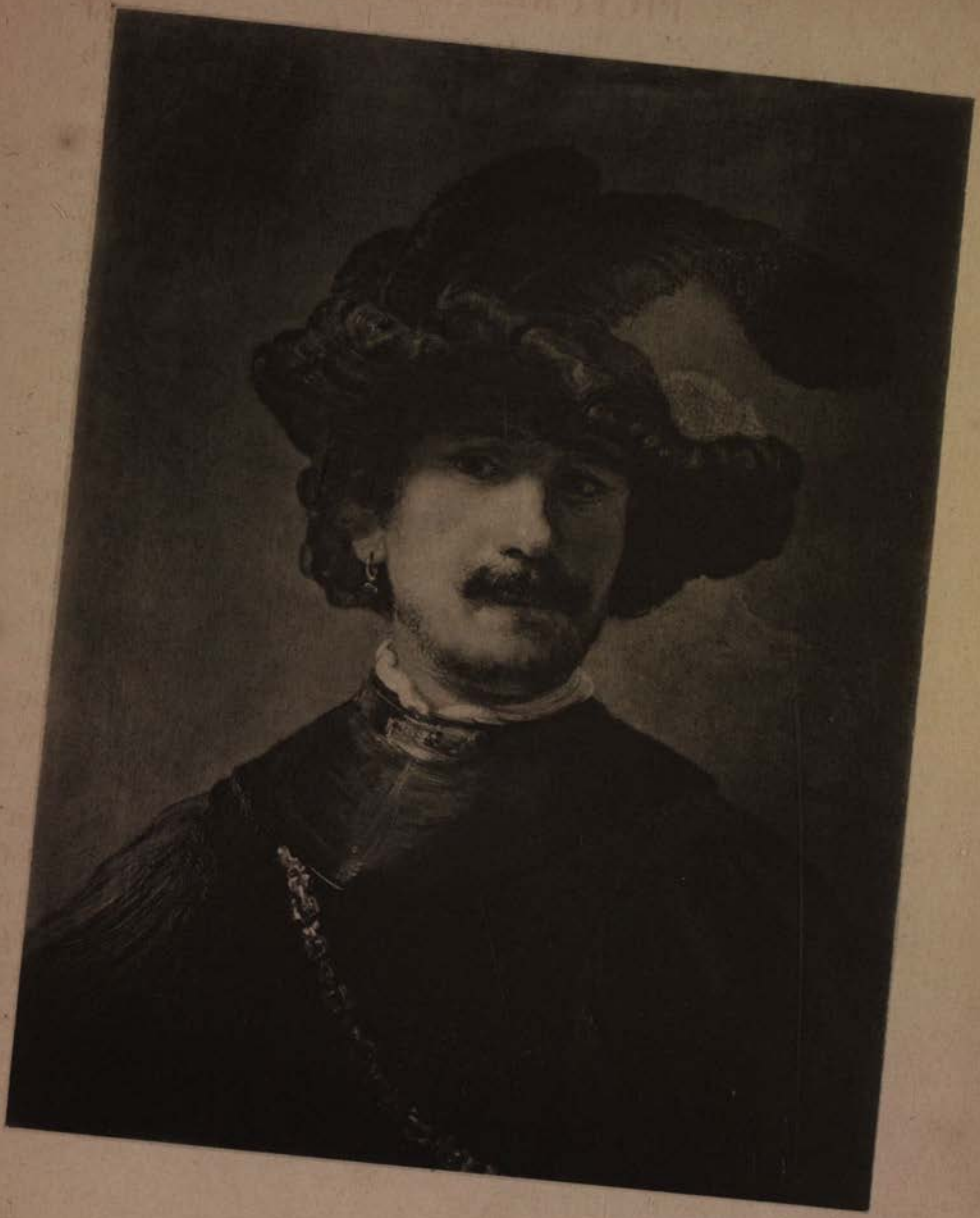
The treatment of a religious theme by the three men reveals their fundamental differences of character, for while Rubens and his pupil approach a religious picture as a fine set piece to be dramatically treated, the Dutchman shows equal interest in getting the human and eternal element into the story. This is seen strikingly in his great etching of "The Healing of the Sick," known as the hundred guilder plate, the finest etched copper ever bitten in.

The amateur will notice a certain ugliness in much

of Rembrandt's work. He sacrificed a good deal of surface prettiness for other qualities, and it needs much closer acquaintance with his work to realise its inherent greatness than is necessary with that of the two Flemish masters, who seem to stretch out a hand to the observer to welcome him to a place where everything shall delight the eye, while Rembrandt says bluntly, "Come into my workshop if it interest you." If Van Dyck is the Mozart of paint, Rembrandt is the Beethoven of the sister art, the mighty master who harmonises the knowledge of the heart of man, which his penetrative genius searches out.

When it comes to the question of workmanship, Rembrandt is in the first rank of all those who have ever wielded a brush. He is termed the great master of chiaroscuro, for he was the first painter to work out all the possibilities of lighting a head from every point of view. The attention he gave to etching and the magnificent results he obtained in *aqua fortis* show that he delighted in trying experiments in lighting.

In the etchings and engravings of Albert Dürer we find little or no attempt to obtain subtleties of tone, an infinite number of planes merging one into the other. He affects a map-like simplicity, securing his effect by the lines of the design, while he troubles little about tone. The Italian painters, too, adopted as a rule the simpler plan of lighting their subjects from the front. It was left to Rembrandt to work



PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST

REMBRANDT

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out much more subtle schemes of chiaroscuro, as in the portrait reproduced, where the face is partly in light and partly in shadow.

In this masterly portrait of himself we can see that the shadow cast by the hat gave him the opportunity of rendering a much more difficult effect than if he had been in full light against a dark background, as in the Van Dyck. It is worth noting that Reynolds, who acknowledged his indebtedness to the Dutchman, in one portrait he painted of himself is shading his eyes with his hand, so that the upper part of his face is in half tone, and in the "Nelly O'Brien" we also see that a subtle and therefore difficult scheme of chiaroscuro is successfully attempted.

Rembrandt worked in the three departments of portraiture, landscape, and religious composition; and to this he added etching, a branch of art in which he is the greatest master who ever used a needle. In his religious pictures, such as "The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant," he made little or no attempt to realise the subject in a photographic sense, or with historical accuracy, for his men and women are the types he saw about him; and as Dutch and Portuguese Jews swarmed around him, he used them as models for his pictures.

His concern was to secure an effective composition in which his mastery of black and white had full scope. There is a somewhat sombre dignity and

solemn impressiveness that is his own, but in place of the "grand manner" affected by Rubens and Van Dyck, we have a naïve simplicity and an entire absence of pretentiousness.

So far as we know he never travelled far from his birthplace and was little influenced by the schools of Italian art, as were his contemporaries. He worked out what was in him in his own way, and with as little conventionality as any man who ever held a brush, for his methods were simple, direct, and individual; and though critics have divided his work into periods, it is not easy to trace the influence other men's work exerted upon him, as one can do with so many other painters.

His youth was passed at Leyden, where he was born in 1606, and where he was apprenticed to Jacob van Swanenburgh. At the age of twenty-five Rembrandt left Leyden, and spent the rest of his life in Amsterdam, where he had been a pupil of Pieter Lastman some years before. He must soon have acquired a lucrative connection among the rich burghers of the town, for he married when twenty-seven Saskia van Ulenburgh, a beautiful fair-haired Frisian maiden, who brought him a substantial dowry, and who bore him four children, the only one who lived being his son Titus, whose portrait is in the Hertford House Collection.

The portrait of himself here reproduced was painted

about two years after his marriage, and in the heyday of his success, for he appears to have been a large collector, and to have filled his house with beautiful things of all kinds. His celebrated portrait picture, "The Anatomy Lesson," was painted when he was twenty-five, a wonderful work for so young a man. His wife, of whom he was so proud, and whose portrait he frequently painted, died in 1642, and whether this great loss made him careless of worldly matters, or whether his patrons fell away, certain it is that in 1657–58 all his effects were sold by auction at a ruinous sacrifice, and the painter was turned out into Amsterdam penniless.

Though the remainder of his life was passed in obscurity and poverty, it was his most productive period. Some of his finest canvases were the work of these pinched years, for outward circumstances had no effect upon his art.

But with all his industry he never recovered his position as a painter in good circumstances. Indeed fashion was against him, the work of other men, now nearly forgotten, being preferred. He was buried at Amsterdam on October 8, 1669. His son Titus died the year before.

Rembrandt is one of those masters with whom intimacy produces no contempt; on the contrary, the more one studies his work the more one is impressed by the painter's genius. Such expressions as "the

greatest etcher who ever used a needle" are apt to convey little to the general reader; but any one who, like the writer, has essayed work *en eau forte*, and compares his most successful achievements with Rembrandt's etchings, realises, all too painfully, what a gulf separates him from that master. His hand carried out with unerring precision what he saw; and the great Dutchman was able to play about with a fascinating mastery, while ordinary mortals work tentatively and hesitatingly, or at best bring about the effects aimed at with much labour and evident effort. Rembrandt had doubtless to make the effort, but he hides his means.

All who are engaged in art, and who therefore know by experience how difficult it is to do even an ordinary thing really well, will wonder, as they scan his work and study his methods, that any man, in spite of constant hindrances, could have explored so thoroughly the many mansions in the Realms of Art, solving their secrets, and making them his own.

CHAPTER XIV

FRANS HALS

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FRANS HALS

FRANS HALS was a contemporary of the three men whose work we have just considered, though he lived forty-four years longer than Van Dyck and twenty-three years longer than Rubens and Rembrandt, both of whom were sixty-three at their death. This long working period of eighty-six years is in marked contrast with the forty-two years of Van Dyck.

Hals died at Haarlem in 1666, and in the museum of that town some of his finest works are to be seen.

"The Laughing Cavalier" is an excellent example of his method, as it is one of his most characteristic works.

This masterpiece at Hertford House is always a favourite picture with visitors who see the Wallace Collection for the first time, for its qualities are such as to attract the eye at once. Hals is the humorist in paint; and just as the wit scores over the philosopher in conversation—one recalls Garrick's couplet on Goldsmith, and the poet's reply in verse—so we open our

arms to welcome him who will make us pleased with ourselves and satisfied with life; and this is what Hals undoubtedly does.

There were cakes and ale, or as we translate it beer and skittles, for this handsome cavalier when there was no fighting to be done; he had no desire to trouble himself about problems which agitate those of a studious turn of mind, and make them take life and themselves so seriously as to preclude the luxury of a laugh.

Hals' handsome model, in his richly-embroidered habiliments that show him to such advantage, evidently realised that "the world was not so bitter but a smile would make it sweet."

> "I have fought my fight, I have lived my life,
> I have drunk my share of wine;
> From Trier to Coln there never was knight
> Led a gallanter life than mine!"

might have been the very lines he trolled as he sat outside the tavern, one eye on his own handsome person and the other fixed on some pretty wench, and Kingsley may have thought of this "laughing cavalier" when he penned them.

There are few more difficult things to paint than a smile. To make a face laugh is what many artists have attempted, but very few have done successfully. It was a gift with Hals to catch the fleeting expressions and give them permanence in paint. There is

an exhilarating vitality about his work that is characteristic of the man, giving it distinction and fascination. To secure this movement of feature, to be able to seize upon and reproduce the careless, jocund mood—in short, to paint the picture here reproduced requires swiftness of touch and an unerring hand, and Frans Hals takes very high rank in the select company of proved experts, for his dexterity in brushing on the colour is unrivalled.

As we study "The Laughing Cavalier" we find a love of detail and manipulation which is not seen in Rembrandt. The embroidery on the sleeve and the lace collar are put in with a lingering fondness which tells us that Hals enjoyed work for its own sake. In this particular he is linked with the painters of the sixteenth century who preceded him, and whose love of detail was carried to excess; and yet, unlike so many of them, Hals succeeds in securing breadth of effect, for at the right distance from the canvas the details in this picture fall into place, and in no way interfere with the painting of the head. When we examine this part of the canvas we are struck with the artist's naïve simplicity of method, so little trouble does he take to hide the way the thing is done.

In the art of Rembrandt there is a sense of mystery; the veil of genius comes better between the spectator and the work, hiding the trick of production; but before this canvas of Hals the tyro feels he could go and

paint a laughing cavalier himself after a course of lessons, so clearly is the method made manifest. It is only on attempting this that the simplicity the picture wears is found to be that of genius defying successful imitation.

Hals' method differs in a marked way from that of Rembrandt, for he illumines his picture generally, so that the colours introduced are not toned by or lost in such shadows as Rembrandt allows to play over the whole composition.

But if Hals lacks the mystery we find in Rembrandt, he is a perfect workman whose eye was trained to see clearly what it is possible for paint to do, and his hand was in nice equipoise with the eye, so that it never faltered in carrying out its appointed task; and after all there is no better definition of successful technique than that the eye and hand are equally trained, so that the vision is not obscured by inadequate handling, nor the power of brushing given up to mere imitation of still life.

We can think of many men who have had the vision and sense of beauty, but were without the necessary hand-skill to put down what was in their mind's eye. Wordsworth alludes to those who are at heart poets, but are wanting "the accomplishment of verse"; and this does not matter so long as they keep this want to themselves, but when a man joins the ranks of producers he must be judged by the standard set by the best, and all the vision in the world is thrown away if

we are made to feel the insufficiency of the worker, for we are not disposed to trouble about his gifts of imagination and taste apart from results.

Frans Hals is thought to have been born at Antwerp in 1584. At a time when the Dutch nation fought for independence and won it, the painter appears in the ranks of its military guilds. He was also a member of the Chamber of Rhetoric, and Chairman of the Painters' Corporation. His own character may be read to some extent in the picture reproduced, for he seems to have been a careless, free-living citizen, a little too much addicted to carousals and the society of tap-rooms.

He married twice, his first wife having been ill-treated by him, and, like Rembrandt, his gathering troubles finally came to a head, and he was sold up in 1654 at the suit of a baker. Subsequently his rent and firing were paid for by the municipality until he was granted a pension of two hundred florins.

We may admire the spirit which enabled him under these circumstances to produce some of his most striking canvases. As his widow had to seek outdoor relief from the guardians of the poor, we may infer that Hals after his failure lived a hand to mouth existence, and to this period belong his studies of fishwives and tavern heroes, who little thought to be immortalised by a painter who must have appeared so much akin to themselves.

It is customary with a certain order of critics to rate men like Hals low down in the list of great

painters, because of his commonplace subjects; but surely his matter-of-fact outlook, when it is allied to such inimitable power of brushing, is far more satisfactory to the onlooker than a vision that, like ambition, "o'erleaps itself." He was the Meissonier of his day, the painter content to realise what the eyes of the head rather than the eyes of the mind take in; and he spared himself no pains, thought no trouble too great, to secure the result he aimed at, as is at once apparent in the picture reproduced. It is confusing the issue to belittle a man for the subjects of his work, when he has done it as well as it can be done. "That is best which lieth nearest, carve from that thy work of art," is the advice given to the sculptor in Longfellow's poem, and there is much wisdom in the aphorism. Success is won by doing with full strength what is undertaken, and not in scheming out ideas that are quite beyond reach. "The Laughing Cavalier," one feels, will be remembered long after poetical dreams poorly carried out have been cast into the limbo of forgotten things.

CHAPTER XV

DE HOOCH

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DE HOOCH

THE number of excellent painters working in the Low Countries in the seventeenth century speaks eloquently of the prosperity of the people. There was a large, rich merchant class to patronise them, and in Amsterdam, The Hague, Antwerp, Haarlem, and other busy centres of trade, fine collections of pictures by living artists were formed, for the demand for earlier works was too limited to affect the picture market.

Fortunes were not sunk in just two or three much-talked-of masterpieces, nor was the market manipulated by a ring of dealers in order to pass on works bought cheap at an enormous profit, but the merchants with margins to their incomes steadily patronised the art craftsmen of their day. That the prices were not inflated we may judge from the fact that in 1611 Rubens was paid 2400 florins for his large picture, "The Descent from the Cross," now at Antwerp, a sum not much larger than many an R.A. receives for a picture at the Academy.

PICTURES IN THE

A wealthy bourgeoisie will show the fibre of their mind in their art purchases, and we find among the artists of Le Pays Bas a number of skilled workmen who laid themselves out to please such an important set of patrons. Among these were Pieter de Hooch and Meindert Hobbema. They are men of talent restricted in their outlook, circumscribed by their environment, who devoted their gifts to pleasing their rich neighbours, and who reached by this strict attention to business a lively excellence which assures for their work in our day a place in the collections of the connoisseur.

Theirs was not the talent to attract the attention of emperors and kings, as did that of Rubens and Van Dyck. So far as we may judge at this distance of time, and from the scanty records that have come down to us, they pursued the even tenor of their way, for there were no biographers to record their doings, as ordinary folk who lived, worked, died, with no break in the usual routine to attract the attention of the journalists of their day.

All we know of Pieter de Hooch is that he was born about 1630, possibly at Rotterdam, and died about fifty years later. His portrait, painted by himself at the age of nineteen, is in the Amsterdam Gallery, and shows us a young man with a pale, thoughtful countenance of the Calvinistic type, deep-set, somewhat sad eyes, and long, straight hair lying low on a wide turned-down collar.

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INTERIOR, WITH WOMAN AND BOY

By De Hooch

Rembrandt, who died when De Hooch was about forty, exerted great influence upon him, but he possessed gifts of his own which he developed with rare skill and patience, as can be seen in the example, thoroughly characteristic of this admirable artist, here produced, save that the sunny, beautiful colour, which so distinguishes his pictures, can only be dimly felt in black and white.

He painted the life around him, the homely, comfortable, leisurely life of the bourgeois with means; and he made a great feature of the Dutch houses of the day with their inner courtyards, and glimpses of the street or garden as seen through the halls and passages.

Our example of his work shows a sort of vestibule in cool shadow; the light, which is subdued, comes through leaded glass, in which a little colour is introduced. A child is bringing a basket of pomegranates, presumably as a present for the woman of the house, who is stooping to take them from him. Then we have the inner courtyard, the sunlight athwart it, and through the passage leading to the street we catch a glimpse of a sunlit roadway, and of the house beyond, in the doorway of which another woman is standing, as though waiting for a return of the boy with the basket.

Here we have a series of planes with varying degrees of light, all so skilfully managed that the aerial perspective gives one a feeling of space. We can walk through the courtyard and corridor into the street

beyond, so well has the painter managed his light and shade.

It is a triumph of work to think that paint, mere inert pigment, can, in De Hooch's hands, so cunningly render the varying qualities of light, can even simulate the source of all light itself! It seems that paint can go no further than this, and that those artists who prefer the colour of death to that of life are missing the most unique opportunity that pigment gives them; and yet in many modern works the colour is kept so low in tone —becomes so dirty in fact—that one would think mud were good enough for such to daub with. Surely light is the thing best worth rendering in paint, for light implies space, and even life itself; while gloom and darkness suggest disease and death.

De Hooch so evidently "found himself" in these pictures of the simple life he saw around him, these interiors with peeps through doorways, for which he is celebrated, that he painted little else, though in the Louvre is an example of a richly-decorated room, with a finely-sculptured fireplace, and a group of card-players.

Many pictures in the National Gallery by the painters of the "grand manner" of gods and goddesses, classical symbolism, and legendary history, lack this homely attraction, but "The Court of a Dutch House," where a servant and child are descending some steps from an outhouse into a court, while a broom, pail, plants, and a

dustbin occupy the foreground, appeals at once to the eye and mind by the direct simplicity of its charms.

Pictures by this master are very rare. Smith, in his *Catalogue Raisonné*, enumerates but sixty-eight. The National Gallery contains three, the Wallace Collection two, and there are two in Buckingham Palace. Very seldom does an example come into the salerooms, and when it does it reaches a long price; yet it is asserted that the dealers a century ago erased the signatures of De Hooch and Hobbema, substituting those of painters who were then in demand. How the wheel turns!

Just as a simple statement of fact in literature is more impressive than rhetorical rhodomontade, so the frank, naïve rendering of life, as it presents itself to the gaze of the ordinary observer when it shows fine craftsmanship, is far more valuable, both as art and as a human document, than the false sentiment which passes for poetry, and the turmoil and exaggerated action which does duty for drama.

The painters in the Low Countries appear always to have been a sane, level-headed race, such as we should expect from a nation of merchants and shopkeepers, and the art that appealed to such patrons appears to have been the literal, and even the commonplace. To exhibit themselves as well-trained craftsmen was their highest aim. Subject with them was of far less importance than method. One sometimes regrets that their idea of

beauty was, from our point of view, not more attractive, and that their love of the commonplace, and even brutal, shows itself so frequently, but sincerity and workmanship are, after all, very high qualities in painting, and De Hooch was richly dowered with both. He is a finer colourist, and has a tenderer manner and more refined outlook than Ostade, Brouwer, or Teniers. He sits in the company of Metsu, Mieris, and Terborch, rather than with the painter of "Boors Carousing"; and De Hooch's work charms us because of its unaffected simplicity and entire absence of pose. He painted masterpieces, not because he laid himself out for this, but because he brought to the rendering of the everyday life around him a sympathy, a taste to select what was pleasant to look upon, and a thoroughly workmanlike quality, which enabled him to express himself as a man who has full command of the language he uses.

He does not come short of his vision; rather his accomplishment gives to his subjects beauty, interest, and distinction.

CHAPTER XVI

HOBBEMA

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HOBBEMA

MEINDERT HOBBEMA'S reputation as one of the finest of Dutch landscape painters of the seventeenth century has only been won in quite recent years, for the neglect that seems to have been his guerdon during his life did not end with his death. It is asserted that dealers a century ago put other names to his canvases, as they did to those of other masters, in order to sell them. The few works, however, by this master which have come into salerooms within recent years have gone for enormous sums, so highly esteemed are his paintings by wealthy connoisseurs.

The National Gallery possesses five of Hobbema's works, and the Wallace Collection the same number, so that his methods and style can be well studied at either gallery. The amateur should assure himself that he takes with him to the understanding of Hobbema a mind free from prejudice, and one that is ready to avoid unfair comparisons. He must be judged intrinsically,

and not pitted against his French contemporary Claude, or such men of the modern school as Turner.

There is nothing romantic or classical about Hobbema; he is a literalist, and his chief endeavour is to render faithfully the scenery he found in the vicinity of Amsterdam, where he is thought to have been born in 1638. Personal records are scanty enough. Ruysdael, who was his master, witnessed his marriage to Eeltie Vinck in 1668. She died in 1704, and the painter, who lived in the Roosegraft, where Rembrandt passed the last sad years of his chequered life, was, it is said, buried as a pauper in 1709. It has been stated that the painter was employed in the Excise, and if so, it was a case parallel with that of Burns, who was made a gauger of ale barrels.

Pleasanter and far more profitable is it to turn to his work rather than indulge in surmises as to the part Hobbema played on life's stage, which it is to be feared was at best a poorly paid one. Bearing in mind what has just been said as to approaching his work with no *parti pris*, we shall see in it the forerunner of the modern realistic school, the *plein air* of the French; not the school that inspired Turner, but that which gave the impetus to Constable. Writing in 1802, the year he first exhibited, the great English landscape painter said: "There is room enough for a natural painter. The great vice of the present day is *bravura*, an attempt to do something beyond the truth. Fashion

always had and will have its day, but truth in all things only will last. . . . I shall endeavour to paint English landscape without fal-de-dal or fiddle-de-dee."

These lines might have been penned as a commentary on the work of Hobbema, who was at this time (1802) beginning to be appreciated at his right value.

Hobbema chose his subjects from the country around him, Middelharnis, Haarlem, Koevorden, and so far as we may judge by his works never wandered far afield; whereas the most popular pictures of his master, Jacob von Ruysdael, such as "The Waterfalls" at Hertford House, are clearly adapted from similar paintings by Everdingen, as there is reason to believe that Ruysdael never visited Norway, a surmise borne out by internal evidence, for there is a scenic and fictitious appearance about his pictures that would be called "want of locality" in modern art parlance. They are generalisations and not particular instances, not effort to realise the scene before the painter, but compositions built up from slight data supplied by others, inner consciousness providing the cement.

Hobbema on the other hand depicts what was before him with all the skill he can command, and while his master nearly always renders nature in her grander, wilder aspects—the tragedy of the torrent, the dirge of the storm, his pupil contents himself with making his torrent flow through sluice-boxes to turn a mill-wheel! And yet, how much more impressive is the

realism of this water falling into the mill-pool, than the melodramatic fury of Ruysdael's rushing river.

It must not be thought that because Hobbema painted what he found close to his house, he sat down and painted just anything. His taste is shown in what he selects to record, and the alterations he makes so as to secure balance and a pleasing opposition of lines. His pictures are carefully composed, and a certain conventional treatment of trees, as well as his colour scheme, have gained for his works with some critics the charge of being "tea-boardy." His colour is certainly somewhat austere, and there seems very little vapour in the air to give mystery or lend enchantment to the view.

Hobbema keeps himself well in hand, and one feels as one looks at his quiet, peaceful scenes, where men have leisure for fishing and women for talking, that there is no passion consuming him, no fire raging within, but an abiding love of Nature in her everyday mood, with apparently no desire to see her shaken to the centre, crushing man beneath the avalanche, and smiting him to earth with the thunderbolt. In interpretation of his work, Tennyson's lines may with appropriateness be recalled :—

> "And one, an English home, grey twilight poured
> On dewy pastures, dewy trees,
> Softer than sleep, all things in order stored,
> A haunt of ancient peace."

LANDSCAPE, WITH A WATERMILL

By Hobbema

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If for a moment we glance at the work of men who painted during Hobbema's lifetime in other countries—Claude and Poussin in France, Rosa in Italy—we have work the antithesis of the Dutchman's. To be impressive they had to see Nature either in a grand way or else in tragic guise. They used Nature merely to express themselves; Hobbema expressed himself through Nature, but in so subordinate a way that his personality can hardly be said to come between his audience and his subject. Nature was to him a living force, to be approached humbly yet lovingly, for he saw that it was good.

The classical landscape painters, on the contrary, lay ruthless hands on Nature, and wrench her to their purpose; they were much more concerned about themselves than for the great genial mother, and in their company one soon tires of the grandiose and rhetorical, and longs for the simple charm of the dark pools shadowed by poplars and willows, and the stream in which an Isaac Walton may angle for a chub, on whose waters a mill may grind corn, and by whose banks cows may be seen browsing in the water meadows.

Such work as Hobbema's makes small appeal to those whose taste is for the ornate and melodramatic; who think that paint should captivate one by its story, or awe one by the grandeur of its aims and the emphasis of its methods. Its very quietness and restraint constitute its charm, and satisfy those who possess their

souls in peace, and do not want to tear a passion in tatters, but are content to have a mirror held up to Nature.

The world will always return to the simple and direct work from Nature, though for a time the ornate, highly embellished, falsely refined, may dazzle and captivate us, and make us forget that simplicity is the bedrock of all great art, be it poem, prose, play, or picture.

When opportunity offers to visit Hertford House the lover of landscapes should glance at the modern French school, Corot and Rousseau. The latter has more in common with Hobbema than the former, who in his finest work is content to suggest all objects with a few light, careless, though carefully disposed touches. Yet Corot's early pictures show that he saw Nature in much the same way as did Hobbema, *i.e.* as a multitude of details ; but as his powers matured the French painter presented his ideas in the simplest way possible — without finish, some think, because there is no evidence of it on the surface ; but work with Corot effaced the footsteps of work. Nature was mysterious, wonderful, evasive, and he tries to suggest these subtle ideas by the way he brushes the pigments on his canvas ; his art is a secret, a holy of holies, which the painter is not going to profane by allowing the ignorant or unsympathetic to enter behind its veil.

We find periods when this great canon of sim-

plicity is thrust out of sight, and when some artist by his supreme gifts will make us set up some other standard in order to reconcile our thoughts and beliefs with our disposition, which is to admire the brilliant work. Let this genius have followers, and let these followers found a school, as they are sure to do, building up a gospel of art out of chance sayings and brilliant *tours de force* of their master, and the superficiality and meretricious qualities will soon out, and nothing but failure is in front of those disciples who draw their inspiration from artifice instead of Nature.

The history of art records many instances where a band of enthusiasts has started up to take a new road, or return to an old one, rather than follow the crowd; beginning with protests, they end by putting themselves athwart the tendency of the day, because the fire that had once shone bright enough as a beacon had burnt itself out, and the sparks that remain are insufficient to act any longer as a guide.

A new star in the east has to arise when work has come to live entirely on tradition, and not by going to nature as the fountain-head. English landscape owes more to Constable, who made this his aim, than to Wilson, who set up convention before nature, and there are many more admirers of Hobbema to be found than of Rosa or the Poussins, for the Dutchman acts as a kind of cicerone to nature. He seems to say, "Come out with me and spend a pleasant day in the

country; listen to the choiring of the birds, the murmur of the bees, the lap of the water running over its pebbly bed;" while the "grand" masters try to create an effect by forcing nature to reveal their own turbulent, strained lives, in which the voice is pitched high, and passion is lost in mere bluster and gesticulation.

CHAPTER XVII

HORACE VERNET

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HORACE VERNET

IF in England art became trammelled by a set of inflexible rules, and artists allowed their individuality to be hampered by principles at the opening of the last century, still more true is it of the painters in France. This, as we have already seen, was brought about by following precedent instead of going to Nature, the fountain of perennial life, so far as art is concerned. When artists copy the tricks and adopt the conventions of those who have just gone before, all real vitality, which gives the power to touch the heart as well as the head, is sacrificed to appearance, and if we come to consider what results from this great loss, we shall find a sort of false refinement; gentility in place of virile energy.

The followers of any great man whose personality has been so powerful as to dominate the men who eventually will have to take up the command, are sure to attach unnecessary importance to small matters, and even to elevate weaknesses and mannerisms into life-giving principles, when in truth they are death-

dealing devices. It is the touch of Nature—not the shibboleths of art—that makes the whole world kin, and surely the meaning of that pregnant saying in this connection is that the artist can only hope to touch a wide audience by appealing to those eternal verities—truth, simplicity, and strength.

The world is not always engaged in thinking fresh thoughts; much time is given to the re-stating of old truths; painters are again and again turning back to retrace their steps, because some one more thoughtful than the rest becomes convinced that the path that is being followed is merely a winding by-lane leading to a *cul de sac*, and not the great high-road.

Horace Vernet and Paul Delaroche come between the so-called classicism of the eighteenth century and the realism of the middle and latter part of the nineteenth century. We can see what men like Rousseau, Corot, Diaz, leaders of the new movement, which was dubbed *Romanticist* to distinguish it from the *Classical*, were doing during the lifetime of Vernet and Delaroche, but this movement does not seem to have touched the painters of "Tamar" and "The Virgin and Child."

There must be much inducement for a painter of religious pictures to fall into line with the men who have trodden that pathway before them. Thus conventionality is induced merely by the choice of subject, and religious subjects are so well worn that small opportunity is available for new renderings. It is like

JUDAH AND TAMAR

By Vernet

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taking such a theme as "The Last Rose of Summer" to write variations upon; a Beethoven could hardly hope to succeed at this late time.

A religious picture must above all things be sincere; there must be no *arrière pensée*, no affectation, or the vraisemblance is destroyed. The early religious painters in Italy, though there is much that we style conventional about their work that they did not intend to be such, did really believe in the dogmas they symbolised by their art. The church for whom they worked was a living vital force in the daily lives of those who produced the pictures that were destined to adorn the sanctuaries.

There is entire absence of theatrical effect, because there is no showing off on the part of those early painters. The subjects are treated from within rather than from without. We find an analogy in the passion-play of Ober-Ammergau, played by simple folk as a religious exercise. A hardened playgoer like Jerome K. Jerome has told us, in his "Diary of a Pilgrimage," that no acting he had ever seen moved him as did that of those Bavarian peasants; but transplant the play to the Empress Theatre at Earl's Court, shall we say, and the religious feeling would have departed; a "simulacrum," offensive to taste, would be in its place.

Vernet's picture, "Tamar and Judah," is an effective tableau. He had lived in Algiers, whither he was sent

officially in 1837 to obtain material for illustrating the series of battles which culminated in the taking of Constantine. The life of the East, its colour, the types of humanity to be seen, offered scope to the dexterous and academically learned painter, and this canvas is one of many Eastern subjects he produced at the time. If we examine it critically it cannot be considered other than a clever piece of workmanship—a good furniture picture, as we say in these days. We may note one quality in it that makes for artistic righteousness; Vernet has not imported any sham religious sentiment into his composition. The man is an Arab, evidently studied from life, while the landscape background has the note of realism. It appears that Vernet had to defend himself before the Academy for treating Biblical scenes in this naturalistic manner by dressing his personages in the costume of the day, which the evidence he had gathered in the East enabled him to do successfully. "Tamar" hints of the model, and as a religious picture the canvas is unconvincing; the painter who may have thought to secure a purchaser by giving the work the title it bears has not secured the approval of posterity by putting such a tag to his picture.

Those who know Vernet's colossal works at Versailles will see that with all his facility, energy, and accomplishment—for his work is brutally correct—his love of the grandiose and his constant striving to be impressive, leaves a modern audience cold and almost hostile. The

insincerity of this art of which Vernet is so characteristic a master is seen to the full in "The Apotheosis of Napoleon," on the walls of Hertford House.

Few men gathered a fuller harvest during their lifetime than did the painter of "Tamar and Judah," for he had emperors as patrons and a great country as an employer, while honours and wealth flowed to him during his long working life. He was born in Paris at his father's studio in the Louvre in 1879, and died in the same city so late as 1863. His grandfather was Joseph Vernet, whose work is familiar to visitors to the Louvre, so the boy was born to the very purple of painting; and if Academies and thorough training can make a great painter, then we ought to declare that Horace Vernet takes rank with the best, a judgment which though passed upon him by his contemporaries, posterity has refused to ratify.

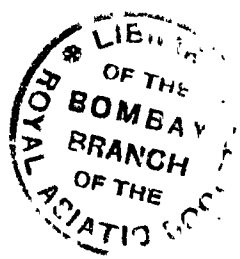
Of his works at Hertford House the best is that which is the least pretentious, and in which his dexterity is devoted to rendering some simple incident, while his disposition to be grandiose is kept in check. Whenever he laid himself out to paint a "grand" subject he fell into exaggeration, and so overshot the mark. His training and surroundings induced this fault, which his enormous success and the emoluments he received tended to perpetuate. It was against this artificial school that the romanticists revolted, striking out a path for themselves, as the Pre-Raphaelites did here.

Vernet, though a painter of battles, never served in the army, though he was twice conscripted. He saw five revolutions: that of 1792 sent a bullet through his father's hand and knocked his own hat off. Among his latest works were scenes from the Crimean War, among them being "The Battle of the Alma."

Just as in this country we can only appreciate the early work of Millais, Rossetti, Holman Hunt, and Woolner (the leading members of the P.R.B.) by comparing their efforts with the prevailing art of the day, so it is interesting to compare such a man as Vernet with those painters who protested against academic traditions, and struck out a path for themselves, and who after years of neglect came to be accepted at their own valuation. Could greater contrast be found than Vernet and Millet, the painter of peasant life, the one building on the foundation supplied him, and living opulent and popular all his days; the other looking at life for himself, taking little on trust, and for more than half his working years barely keeping the landlord, grocer, and baker at bay? And the aftermath? A gradually declining reputation in Vernet's case, with an ever increasing love and admiration for the painter of "The Angelus"!

CHAPTER XVIII

PAUL DELAROCHE



CHAPTER XVIII

PAUL DELAROCHE

DELAROCHE, Vernet's contemporary, has much in common with him, for he is correct, learned, and artificial, and was far more concerned to produce a theatrically effective set piece than to touch the simpler emotions by appealing to our common humanity. The painter of "The Virgin and Child" is the high-priest of a class of art that obtained throughout Europe during the middle of the last century, and is seen in the work of such painters as Bouguereau and the late Lord Leighton, who was obviously a follower of Delaroche.

A sweeping condemnation of such work as the one we are studying is unjust to the painter of "La Vierge au Lèzard," for it is only fair to him and to ourselves to acknowledge the accomplishment exhibited in this canvas. Sheer hard work when a student, as well as untiring industry and regard for reputation, must go to the production of a picture in which the workmanship is so thorough. Its surface beauty is quite exceptional, and beauty is a very high quality in painting just as

melody is a great quality in music, a fact that some critics appear to lose sight of. We must always remember that painting ought to make a direct appeal to the emotion of the beautiful, should satisfy our eye for colour, our sense of proportion, our craving for rhythm of line and well-balanced masses, with the all-important desideratum, unity of effect, to give cohesion to the whole. A picture deficient in beauty is like poetry without melody, and that Delaroche's "Virgin and Child" is "melodious" cannot be denied.

An appreciation of the beautiful is something quite apart from cleverness of manipulation. Thus we find among many of the painters of Holland and Flanders a standard of beauty that does not accord with our preferences. This "love of the ugly," as it has been termed, is revealed in the works of men like Ostade and Brouwer, and may be purely due to the selection of a certain type of model, for these men were literalists and reproduced what was before them, not having Delaroche's refined taste to bring their work up to an ideal standard, or the sense to search after a different type. Beauty though is to a great extent a matter of fashion, and one age may like swan-like necks in their women, while a succeeding one may prefer suppleness of figure.

If we say that refinement is carried to such a point as to rob the canvas of all humanity, it might be urged that painting *is* refined workmanship, and that such a sublime subject, which speaks so augustly to millions,

THE VIRGIN AND CHILD

By Delaroche

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should be elevated, and therefore cannot be too refined. We must admit, too, that the work is wrought with such unerring precision that we feel the absence of all effort; so perfect is the accomplishment that one cannot imagine Delaroche ever pausing, and having to overcome by sheer struggle a difficulty. Yet this very quality of completeness, or perhaps we should say finiteness, leaves us unmoved. The hand that held the brush never faltered, it would seem, from start to finish; yet like a perfectly rehearsed part in which the acting makes no appeal to the heart, we are left cold.

Every academic principle has been obeyed in "The Virgin and Child"; it is the art of the handbook; we would that it were less perfect, for it is too good for human nature's daily food. How true is the studio maxim: "A picture is great, not from the absence of faults, but because of the presence of great qualities." It is like the virtue that comes from conquering the tiger within us, and not from the absence of temptation.

When at Hertford House it is worth while to glance below Delaroche's beautiful picture at Corot's "Macbeth and the Witches," for the painter of this picture was born the year before Delaroche, though the great landscapist lived nineteen years longer. There could not well be two works by contemporary artists that are more absolutely different. Delaroche only asks us to see how well he can paint. He does everything else for us, leaving nothing out of the reckoning, and he only requires us to

foot the bill. Corot, on the other hand, leaves as much to us as he gives us, for while the painter of "The Virgin and Child" is unerring in his touch, Corot is at best but suggestive; he is content to hint at what he intends to convey, and we must let *our* imagination do the rest. The one is the art of insistence, the other of suggestion. We are taken into partnership in Corot's case, whereas Delaroche is our master and only requires approval. We might see something fresh each time we looked at Corot's landscape, so shifting are its beauties, so subtle is its definition; but Delaroche's religious picture strikes its deepest note at first.

It is interesting to recall that Delaroche, who had married Vernet's beautiful sister, lost his wife within a few years, and the grief the painter was plunged into found expression in his religious works, of which the most celebrated is here reproduced.

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